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92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

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Vol. LXXVIII.

Buffalo Bill's Dead-Shot Dragoon.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



"THEY ARE THE BLACK BRIGADE OF SHADOW VALLEY," SAID BUFFALO BILL, BOLDLY HOLDING HIS POSITION.



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Buffalo Bill's Dead-Shot Dragoon;

OR,

The Hidden Home of Shadow Valley

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN HUNTER.

"Do you see that tall, splendid-looking man yonder, Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes; who is he?"

"A man killer."

"Ah! Ready with his gun, and looking for trouble, eh?"

"Not exactly."

"What then?"

"Well, he came into the settlement ten days ago, looking as peaceable as a lamb, but somebody run across his path whom he had met before, and then the trouble began."

"What was it?"

"Quick drawing of guns, quicker shooting, and the other man went down with a bullet in his brain."

"But, yonder fellow showed that he knew how to be a gentleman, for he had his game boxed up and buried at his expense."

"Who was it he killed?"

"Brazos Ben, whom you well knew, Cody."

"Yes; knew him as a very hard citizen, who was much 'wanted,' and I, in fact, came here to take him to the fort for some of his late lawless acts."

"Well, the grave has got him now; so you'll be saved further trouble on his account."

"Then the stranger has done a good service, for Brazos Ben was as bad as they make 'em, and though I never like to speak ill of the dead, I must say that of him."

"I know that; he was a tough of toughs."

"The stranger was doubtless right in his quarrel with him, whatever the quarrel was about."

"It was no quarrel, for not a word was said; only a face to face meeting, and the crack of the guns."

"But they had met before, that encounter proves, and maybe the stranger was looking for him."

"He was; but who is he?"

"Don't know."

"He looks like a city man, but from what you say he must be well up to the ways of the frontier."

"He knows border ways, that is evident."

"But Brazos Ben had a quartette of pards that were as much on the bad as he was."

"Yes, I know; but there now are only two of them left."

"What happened to the other two, Langdon?"

"The stranger."

"Ah! they went for him, then, for killing Brazos?"

"Yes, two of 'em came in the night of Ben's funeral, and they came purposely for trouble, for they talked loud and sassy. That, of course, meant more fight, and the stranger covered them both before they were ready for him. He just said, in the quietest way, that one of them he did not know, the other he did, and that he'd settle it square with him."

"The roughs had to agree, and the stranger dropped his man, both drawing at the word, but the new man was too rapid and shot straight."

"And he did not trouble the other one?"

"No."

"That shows he is on the hunt for certain particular men, I should say."

"It looks so, for the other two pards of Brazos Ben came in then, both on the shoot; but the stranger was not caught off guard, for he killed one, broke the revolver hand of the other, and said he

had no quarrel with him, and had merely shot in self-defense, to wound, not to kill."

"All that was just as business-like as a stake dinner, and when all was over, he ordered the bodies planted, told the man he had wounded to go to the doctor and send all bills to him. Everything was done as he required."

"But the stranger still remains in Perdition City, I see?"

"He does. He's looking for more game, I think, Buffalo Bill. Shall I introduce you?"

"No, I wish to study him unknown. The man interests me, for he is no ordinary person; that is sure."

"The truth is, Mr. Langdon, I am out for game myself, for matters are not going just right at the fort, or in the settlements, and Colonel Gardner has detailed me to go to bedrock and see what could be done, so I came over to Perdition City to arrest Brazos Ben, and see if matters would not improve, for I happen to know that he was living a double life."

"I knew that I could count on your help."

"Every time, Cody—all the time," was the earnest reply.

Lon Langdon was a professional gambler, yet a man whose actions commanded the respect of his foes and the admiration of his friends, who were a host.

He had come to Perdition City to gamble for gold, as he frankly confessed, because he loved money and wanted to win a fortune, and because he also greatly enjoyed the excitement of a game of chance.

He dressed well; enjoyed the best the frontier camp tavern could procure; had a ready hand in helping those in need, and one equally as ready in taking care of himself through any situation that might turn up, as he had demonstrated on more than one occasion, when nerve counted for everything in such a community as was Perdition City.

He had met Buffalo Bill, then a scout at the military post nearest to the mining camps, as Cody entered the camp. Then the conversation, as above recorded, took place.

The two friends entered the Full Hand Saloon together, where the eyes of both discerned the stranger seated at a table alone, enjoying his pipe.

The appearance of the unknown—the Man Killer, as Langdon had named him—riveted Buffalo Bill's attention.

Tall and splendidly formed he was, as he stood up and lighted a slip of paper at the lamp overhead, to relight his pipe—a man with a dark face, smooth shaven, with well-chiseled features, and eyes in which dwelt a strange fascination.

It was a strong, determined face, one not to be forgotten when once seen, and about the person there was a quiet, conscious power, a something which brought up the question why such as he had come to a frontier mining camp—why he had wiped out the outlaw and his pards.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGER CHIPS IN.

The Full Hand Saloon was going at full blast as the gambler and the post scout entered and took seats, just where the latter could get a good view of the stranger, as he sat quietly enjoying his pipe.

"If he's a bad man, then his face belies him; but, then, one can't always tell, so many faces being but masks to hide a lawless heart."

So mused Buffalo Bill, as he sat watching the Man Killer, who did not play cards, who never drank liquor, yet seemed to take delight in being in the noisy, wicked, dangerous crowd, watching the games that were going on about him.

As Lon Langdon went over to his regular table, and sat down for a game, the unknown took a seat nearer to him, where he could watch every play.

To get partners Lon Langdon had called out:

"Who cares for a no-limit game to-night?"

Three men at once stepped forward rough-looking, but known to be card experts, and miners whose "claims" were panning out big money, just then.

In that crowd it was easy to find those who were ready for any game; so the sport well knew that his challenge would be accepted on the mere call.

The four sat down to the table, a fresh pack of "pasteboards" was placed before them, and the game began.

The stranger—who was known only as he had written his name on the books of the Camp Comfort Hotel—Gabriel Grandin—drew nearer, and seemed intently interested in the play.

Buffalo Bill took a position where he could watch the watcher.

If he was not what his face indicated, the observant scout seemed anxious to know the fact.

When Langdon played cards he always commanded attention, for his luck was proverbial, and his manipulation of the cards most skillful.

That he ever played unfair no one had yet been found daring enough to make the assertion.

At times his luck would desert him, and he would have a run of losses; but his face would never change; he lost just as pleasantly as he won, but those who figured over the results came to the conclusion that Lon Langdon was a very heavy winner in the end.

When he proposed a game "without limit" it interested all, and small games were broken up to watch the large one.

It was so in this instance, for those who had accepted the challenge of the gambler were known to be men of nerve, and regarded, indeed, as card-experts.

With all present, the scout was not long in observing that there appeared to be a certain show of uneasiness, as they glanced furtively at the so-called Gabriel Grandin.

Unknown to them all, courteous, yet distant, silent, watchful, never drinking, never playing cards, and having thrice "made a deadly break," as they expressed it, no one seemed just to know how or when he would break out again, and somebody go under.

He certainly was not in Perdition City for fun, and his presence cast a damper upon many, perhaps those more particularly who had a guilty conscience to contend with, and hence really shrank from the penetrating scrutiny of the stranger's scintillant eyes.

The game was progressing, and only once had the stranger met the gaze of Buffalo Bill.

He held that gaze for an instant, showed no sign of the impression made; then looked indifferently away, and Buffalo Bill noted the fact that he did not again meet, recognize, or care for the scout's scrutiny.

The game was begun with a general "bluffing" of the players, but Langdon raked in the winnings in his quiet way and remarked:

"I had an idea that I would be lucky to-night."

A second time he won, and the bets had been heavy.

In the third game one of the miners was the lucky one, and so it was with the fourth and fifth games, until each of the four about the table had been winners—Lon Langdon, however, with two games to his credit.

Then the three miners had their chance once more, and the eight games showed all to stand just about where they started.

The ninth game went against Langdon, as did the tenth and eleventh; then all present heard the words, calmly uttered:

"Change the pack of cards, sir, and

of excellent playing will be rewarded with better luck."

It was the stranger who spoke, and every eye instantly was upon him.

"I hope you do not mean to charge that I am being cheated," remarked Langdon, pleasantly.

"I mean to say that no man, play he ever so skillfully, can win against marked cards."

The three miners were promptly upon their feet, their hands upon their guns.

But the stranger did not move; his eyes rested upon those against whom he had made such a serious charge, and his manner displayed no concern whatever over the effect his words had produced.

"Keep cool, gentlemen," he simply remarked. "I have not accused you all, but I do accuse one, and I'll stake my life against his, that, if the pack is changed, the gentleman's skillful playing will win nine out of the next ten games."

"Dare you risk it, sir?" and his eyes were now riveted upon one of the miners, while the crowd shouted:

"Try it! try it! That's square!"

"He stakes his life against yours, Sam Sharp!"

CHAPTER III.

PUT TO THE TEST.

Buffalo Bill's interest in Gabriel Grandin increased greatly.

Though he did not play, or at least had not gambled since his coming to Perdition City, the man seemed to know considerable about cards—knew very much, indeed, to have discovered what had escaped Langdon's notice.

Though Grandin, even as he uttered the challenge, betrayed no excitement, all present well knew that there was trouble ahead for some one.

The miners who had not been accused looked terribly uneasy. They evidently felt the charge against their comrade keenly.

Langdon had glanced up in a surprised way, looked toward the stranger, then had given Buffalo Bill a significant look, and awaited developments.

All eyes were now upon Miner Sam Sharp, so he dared not shrink from the ordeal, but said:

"Luck comes to first one, then t'other, and we have won, honest. Jest play on with the same pack and see if it changes, Gambler Lon."

"No more play with this pack; we will have fresh cards," and Lon Langdon put down the cards in his hand, for it was his next deal. Quickly did Sam Sharp reach for them, but the stranger, with a lightning-like movement, drove his knife blade through and through the pack, pinning the cards to the table.

An exclamation burst from many lips, for it was at first thought that the blade had gone through Miner Sharp's hand.

It certainly had not missed it very far, as it was.

"These cards remain there as witnesses in my favor or against me," observed Gabriel Grandin calmly.

All realized that he was in deadly earnest, and Lon Langdon called for a fresh pack.

The bartender brought the pack, the fac-simile of the cards knife-pinned to the table.

"Not those," protested the stranger.

"Don't mix yourself up in this, Teddy, but bring a pack not tampered with," sternly said Lon Langdon.

Teddy, an ugly-faced man, but an expert liquor mixer, turned pale, and muttered some excuse; but he quickly brought a fresh pack of a different manufacture and color.

"These will do," remarked Langdon, and he added:

"Now, gentlemen, we will resume our game."

"If it's the same to you, Gambler Lon, I'll draw out, now this gent has made trouble by chipping in," one of the miners observed.

"Me too," echoed the others, who had escaped the accusation.

"No, I was losing, you winning; so I claim my right to hold you to our plan of twenty games," Lon Langdon insisted.

"Who's to be the judge against me?" asked Sam Sharp.

"The games now to be played and those cards pinned to the table," answered Gabriel Grandin.

His words met with applause, one man calling out:

"Yes, it's a test now of whether you were cheating or not, Sam Sharp."

The accused miner wore a very black look, and there was a slight tremor of the hands as he took up the cards, while his two comrades had not quite recovered their nerve.

The new pack was shuffled, the hands dealt out, and every man in the room became deeply interested, save one.

That one, Buffalo Bill noticed, was Gabriel Grandin.

He lay back indolently in his chair, still smoking his pipe, and apparently not even watching the game.

To the surprise of all, Lon Langdon won—which, apparently substantiated the stranger's charge.

A second game was also won by the professional, and all observers noted that he was doing his best now.

The other two miners were growing more and more uneasy, while Sam Sharp was white-faced, black-browed and in a suppressed rage, glowering savagely over toward the silent and unmoved unknown from time to time.

Game followed game, with the same result.

Lon Langdon had bet more heavily than before, had won back what he had lost, and there was a large pile of money to his credit on the table.

Eight games had been run; the ninth was about to begin, and all saw from Sam Sharp's vengeful look that when it was over he intended to act.

Grandin saw it, too, and acted before the ninth game was played.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STRANGER ADDS TO HIS RECORD.

Buffalo Bill had been watching the unknown attentively.

He had not discovered the least interest outwardly taken by the stranger, but the scout, deeply read in human nature, apprehended that the climax was at hand.

He perfectly understood that Sam Sharp intended to fight if that ninth game told against him, and that his accuser was the one upon whom he intended to turn. To redeem his character, he must kill his accuser before the unknown could offer any proofs of his charge.

Now, Buffalo Bill was sure that Gabriel Grandin intended to force the fight; and in a moment more Sam Sharp was cornered.

"Let us settle this matter now, sir," he suggested, still quietly, Sam Sharp now at his mercy.

"Eight of the games that gentleman has won, as I felt that he would, for he plays to win by science, daring, but in a perfectly square, sportsmanlike manner. Professional gamester though he may be, his play is that of a man of honor."

"I have stated that Samuel Sharp won with marked cards. Will you, sir," turning to Buffalo Bill, "take the pack fast to the table, and see if you do not find the cards marked in the left-hand upper corners? The backs, apparently, are a puzzle, but they really reveal the cards' value."

Thus appealed to Buffalo Bill, at once stepped forward, drew the knife from the table, and immediately saw the clever indication on the card of its face value, as stated by the stranger. At this discovery the scout passed the cards around for inspection, simply remarking:

"You are right, sir; the cards are marked, and the question is, did Miner Sharp know the fact?"

"I say he did; and more, I assert that he has leading cards just like them secreted in his shirt front, to use when he was certain that his adversary did not have the cards he wanted, in his hand."

"It is a lie!" shouted Sharp, and his two comrades cried:

"This is going too far."

"Gentlemen, you two wish no quarrel with me, I take it; so do not interfere, especially as you have escaped suspicion of being in league with that man. I am answerable to him, and I shall stake my life against his, as I said I would."

"You are armed, sir, and you very well know that our quarrel goes far back of this game of cards!"

"Fair play!" shouted the crowd, and Sam Sharp was borne backward across the room, while an open space was cleared between the two men, the stranger having generously returned his revolver to his belt.

From the two ends of the room the men then advanced toward the centre, Sharp firing first, and ready to pull trigger a second time, when Gabriel Grandin's weapon cracked.

It was the same story: another man's life written down against the man killer!

A moment of silence followed, then the body of Sam Sharp was carried out of the saloon, Buffalo Bill finding upon it, when he searched, as he did, other marked cards, as the stranger had averred.

A few moments of excited conversation followed; then Lon Langdon called out:

"Gentlemen, who will play without limit?"

"I will, Gambler Lon," answered a voice.

All eyes turned upon the speaker, who proved to be a person known in Perdition as a roving gold hunter, and called Rover Rocks, though he wrote himself down when stopping at Camp Comfort Hotel, as Boyd Bernard.

He was a typical frontiersman in dress, for he wore buckskin leggings, high boots, hunting shirt, slouch hat, and the ever-present belt of arms.

His hair was worn very long, and his face a study for an artist who sought a face of womanly beauty, stamped with determined manhood in spite of his delicate features.

He had frequently scouted for the army—the soldiers asserting that he looked like and imitated Buffalo Bill; he had guided wagon trains across the plains; he would fight odds in any cause; he was known along the entire border, and gave his life up wholly, it was said, to hunting for gold in his wanderings, the hope ever with him that he would "strike it rich" some day.

Rocks was known also as a good hand at cards, though he seldom played, and never for big stakes, and it therefore was a great surprise to hear him accept a challenge to play a game without limit!

Had Boyd Bernard, or Old Rocks, at last struck it rich? Had the Rover discovered his long-sought-for gold mine? was asked by many.

At any rate he took the chair the late Mr. Sharp had occupied, and the new game was begun.

The stakes ran very high, neither Bernard nor Langdon flinching at the risk.

The camp sport was the winner; but, as Rocks paid his score, it was seen that he had plenty more "rocks."

Again the gambler won, yet the Rover's treasury did not seem to have suffered much from the heavy draft upon it.

The third game went the same way, and Buffalo Bill took note of the fact that the stranger, Gabriel Grandin, was once more a very attentive looker-on, his strict attention being devoted to the face of the Rover.

At last the tide turned, and Bernard began to win; but, just as he raked in his winnings, several newcomers stepped into the Full Hand Saloon.

CHAPTER V.

VERY STRANGE HAPPENINGS.

These newcomers, who arrived at a moment of intense excitement over the game, were three in number—men who had been seen in Perdition City before, yet seldom.

When seen there, their stay always had been brief; for, ostensibly, they came solely for provisions, making four visits annually for that purpose.

The first to enter the Full-Hand Saloon had been a young man of thirty, with a frank, good-looking face, strongly stamped with character, and with a look of refinement indelibly imprinted upon it.

He was dressed in a fine suit of beaded and embroidered buckskin, cavalry boots, a black slouch hat, and in addition to his belt of arms had a fine Winchester slung at his back.

His hair was worn long, and his complexion was darkly bronzed, while, as he wore no beard, his youthful appearance was thus made more pronounced.

His companions, two in number, also attracted the attention of those in the crowded camp resort, for they were negroes.

Of herculean build, straight as Indians, black as ebony, and dressed in buckskin, from moccasins to hunting shirt, their picturesque appearance was added to by their wearing silver-embroidered, jet-black sombreros.

They likewise carried rifles swung at their backs, in addition to their belt of arms, and it was noticeable, too, that all their weapons were of latest manufacture and of the best, as were those of the young man, who evidently was their master or chief.

Buffalo Bill had once before seen this same trio, and at a time when he had gone to their rescue when they were at bay on the trail, corralled by a band of Indians.

He had heard that the young man was a lone miner, dwelling in a most distant and secluded spot in the mountains, working at placer mining, with his negro pards to aid him.

More than this no one knew aught about them.

It was whispered in Perdition City that several times had the trio been tracked to their secret mountain home, after coming to the camps for supplies, but those who had shadowed them had not been seen after starting on their trail.

Yet the young man and his blacks had turned up serenely on time when more supplies were wanted, but had nothing to say of being tracked by outlaws anxious to strike it rich by finding their camp or diggings.

Now all knew that the "Man of the Mountains" and his "Black Shadows," as the negroes were called, had purchased their supplies, and were ready to start upon the home trail, for, with no apparent fear of being followed, they always took a look in upon the games and gamblers before leaving, then going out some miles on the trail to camp.

Once it was remembered that a desperado had sought a quarrel with one of the "shadows," and had been promptly knocked down for his insulting words, and in revenge would have killed the negro, but the young Man of the Mountain took up the quarrel; a duel quickly followed, and the desperado was promptly killed.

Nodding here and there to those he had met before, the young man passed through the room to the bar and gave Teddy an order for a couple of bottles of his best liquor.

Buffalo Bill's eyes had turned from Gabriel Grandin upon the strange trio, as they entered, and when he again looked toward the stranger he saw, to his surprise, that he had gone!

Had the presence of the Man of the Mountain anything to do with this sudden departure?

To the scout it looked as though it had. After noting that the stranger had merely left the saloon, Buffalo Bill glanced toward the bar, where the Man

of the Mountain still stood, his two blacks, silent and grim, close to him.

From them the scout glanced toward the table where Gambler Langdon and Old Rocks were.

To his surprise he saw that Boyd Bernard was hastily leaving the table, and, making his way through the crowd, he left the saloon without a glance behind him.

"What was the matter, Lon?" asked the scout.

"Don't know, Cody. He stood to win big money, but suddenly turned white, like a man stricken with heart disease, and called the game off; then he arose and left, as you saw."

"A man turns white from fear, Lon, as well as from heart trouble," the scout suggested.

"What had he to fear, I wonder?"

"Did you see that young man with his two black shadows come in?"

"Oh, yes—the Man of the Mountain—another mystery, Cody."

"Did Boyd Bernard see them enter?"

"Ah! Now you speak of it, I am sure he did—yes, it was their coming which caused Old Rocks to skip. I see that plainly enough now."

"And our Avenger has skipped, too."

"What? Gabriel Grandin?"

"Yes; he's levanted."

"But why?"

"He went out as quickly as did the Rover when he saw that trio, and, if I don't miss my guess, for the same reason."

"This is getting mighty interesting, Cody!"

"To me, yes; ah! the Trio are also going, and—so am I."

"You intend to shadow them?"

"I intend to see what made the unknown skip out—then Bernard. In fact, I propose to satisfy my curiosity about several things. I wish to get at the bottom of a whole bagful of mysteries, and when we meet again, Lon, I may have something to tell you," and the scout also vanished from the saloon.

Going to the Camp Comfort Hotel, Buffalo Bill was not long in discovering that the Trio had departed from the camp, and also that Old Rocks, who had engaged a room for the night, had mounted his horse and disappeared.

Another discovery Cody made—that Gabriel Grandin, likewise, had left the hotel—what for, or where to go, it was for the now deeply interested scout to ascertain.

"I must wait until daylight, for I can pick up the trails then," decided the trail hunter, and he returned to the Full Hand Saloon.

CHAPTER VI.

UNSEEN FOES.

Winding along a deer trail that followed the summit of a ridge, or rather what might better be called one bank of a vast canyon, Buffalo Bill halted his horse from time to time to gaze upon the grandeur of the scene about him.

He had been lifting all day the trail that led him from Perdition City, which he had left at the first glimmer of dawn.

It was the trail of the mysterious young gold hunter and his two black guards.

But the scout saw that there were other hoof-tracks than those of the three horses the Trio had ridden.

He had been told that there were three pack animals as well; but the trail lifter discovered even more than the tracks of six horses—*there were eight.*

This appeared to indicate that two others were along, having joined the Trio, or were following them, and the tracks of two of the horses indicated the latter.

So the scout pushed steadily on until, in the afternoon, he came to the ridge forming one side of a deep, wild, and picturesque canyon, through which dashed a foaming torrent.

As he halted momentarily in admiration of the scene, a puff of smoke burst from the rocks across the canyon, and a bullet struck the saddle horn with a dull thud.

A glance was sufficient to show the scout the disadvantage at which he was placed.

He could not see his foe, could not reach him; so there was but one thing to do—to dodge to shelter.

Therefore down the ridge he spurred, to gain the shelter of some timber, which he safely did.

Who was his unseen foe, he wondered?

He noted as he rode on that the canyon widened, and far ahead he saw that it spread out in a magnificent valley, with ranges of lofty mountains upon either side, while the torrent enlarged into a river winding through scenery bewilderingly beautiful and impressive. And the trail of the Trio and the others, whoever they were, still led on, winding down the mountain slope into the valley.

Continuing on, the scout reached the valley and followed the trail along the banks of the pretty stream, with heavy timber growing here and there upon its banks.

He had not forgotten that he had been fired upon, and kept his eyes on the alert to discover his unseen foe, for to meet there would place them upon more equal terms, if meet they must or would.

But, even as he looked, another puff of smoke burst over the bank of the stream, and the bullet struck the massive buckle of the army belt squarely in the centre, the blow causing Buffalo Bill to reel in his saddle, while his startled horse gave a bound that threw him heavily to the ground.

The scout was not hurt by the bullet or the fall, and springing to his feet he beheld his foe rushing upon him!

The foe saw that the scout was ready for him, that he had made a mistake in leaving his covert so soon, and he quickly opened fire with his revolver.

But Buffalo Bill's weapon cracked a second later, and down on his face went his intended assassin.

Walking rapidly toward him, Buffalo Bill turned the body over, and as he recognized who it was he had killed, the words broke from his lips in mingled surprise and sorrow:

"My God! it is Old Rocks—Boyd Bernard!"

For some moments the scout stood like one dazed, hardly knowing what to do, and several times he murmured:

"Why did he seek my life?"

At last he roused himself, searched the body, looked about for a spot to bury it, and, to his surprise, found a grave at the foot of a large, smooth-barked tree.

The grave had sunken in half its depth, and the scout determined to place the body of Boyd Bernard in it and fill it in.

Wrapping the form in a blanket, he placed it in the grave, and soon had it covered over, cutting poles to fasten down over the top to keep wild beasts off.

"I will cut his name here in this—why, what is this cut here already—"

"My best friend lies in this grave!"

For some time Buffalo Bill pondered over his discovery; but, shaking off his revery, was himself again, and while his horse fed near, he began to cut into the bark with his bowie knife the name of Boyd Bernard, and the date.

The sun, nearing the western range, cast its rays full upon his work, and he had nearly completed his task, and was cutting the figure "6" in the date, when there came the sharp crack of a rifle, and Buffalo Bill sank down on the grave of the man he had killed.

Hardly had he done so when there came the clatter of hastily coming hoofs, and four black horsemen dashed into view!

CHAPTER VII.

THE HIDDEN HOUSE.

In a secluded niche of the beautiful valley into which Buffalo Bill had followed the trail of the Gold Hunter and his Black Guards, a house was hidden away under the shelter of overhanging cliffs, a house one would not expect to find in that wild and remote land.

Had Nature so willed, a more lonely spot could not have been found than that little vale, nor one more securely hidden.

Its approach was not visible to one riding along the large valley, unless very near to it, and then only would a keen eye make the discovery that, what appeared to be a solid cliff a thousand feet in height, had a rent in it, from summit to base.

From this cliff to the river, a quarter of a mile away, was only a rock soil, allowing no track to be visible, not even of an iron-shod hoof, for in heavy rains the wash-out of the little vale swept all the dirt off its stone foundation.

Pausing in the chasm in the cliff, and which was not fifty feet in width, one came to a barrier of heavy logs, in which were bars.

From that point the vale in all its solitude and beauty burst into view a perfect little garden spot of wild flowers, velvet grass, pine trees, and running vines.

Back against the cliffs was a seemingly bottomless spring, for it had no outflow, and the water was as clear as crystal and very cold.

In this vale a dozen fine horses were feeding, and back in the shelter of the timber several stoutly built log cabins were visible.

Upon the day when Buffalo Bill followed the trail into the large valley, to be thrice fired upon by unseen foes, shortly after noon, a young woman was seated before the centre one of the three cottages, and the largest of them, for it had four rooms, and an open space or hall-way in the middle, dividing them into two on each side.

It was a comfortably built cabin home, surrounded by a rude piazza, with the ground for a flooring.

Under the piazza roof, against the cabin walls, hung a couple of side saddles, several for men, bridles, and any number of skins of wild beasts.

Within the cabin all was neat and comfortable, the furniture being decidedly home-made.

The front room on the left was a combined kitchen and dining room, for a table was spread for two, and a handsome young negress was busy about the fire, getting dinner.

Out on the lawn, beneath a large tree, sat the one referred to—a young and beautiful girl, apparently of twenty.

She was dressed in a woolen shirt-waist, a buckskin skirt, worn short, top boots, and a slouch hat. In her hands she held an open book, though her eyes were gazing down the vale oftener than upon the volume's pages.

In the cabin on the left were two negro men, one of them cleaning a rifle, the other making a rawhide lariat.

The cabin on the right appeared to be a general storehouse for provisions, pelts, and other things.

"Quickstep!" called the young lady, in a clear, musical voice, and the negress stepped out of the cabin with a cheery:

"Yes, Miss Luella."

"They are not in sight yet."

"They'll be along soon, miss."

"Dinner is ready, I know, though you have tried to keep it back."

"About ready, miss."

"They should have returned by noon, and it is now two o'clock."

"They'll soon be along, missy."

"I am always anxious when their visits to that horrid settlement have to be made, but it must be, I know. Bert is always careful; yet there are so many bad men in this wild land, I am always

uneasy when he is away, and you know they have been waylaid several times."

"Yes, Miss Luella, and always come out all right. Mars' Bert knows how to take care of himself, and so do Jack and Jerry."

"But why do they not come?"

"I don't know, missy; but it is a long trail to Perdition City, and maybe they didn't get off last night, so waited until this morning."

"In that case they will not be here until nearly night."

"No, missy."

Quickstep, the negress, returned to her work, and the beautiful young woman, for some reason hiding in that far land, resumed her reading.

But she had not read many pages when a neigh from one of the horses feeding in the vale caused her to look quickly down toward the break in the cliff, and she called out cheerily:

"Here they are, Quickstep! Put dinner on!"

Her eyes were now upon some horsemen coming up the trail.

They were two in number, and were leading three pack animals, well laden.

The two were negroes, and the sight of them caused the young girl to cry out in alarm:

"Oh, where is Bert? My God! can anything have happened to him?"

With the words she dashed the book upon the ground and ran like a deer to meet the two Black Horsemen.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN SUSPENSE.

"Jack! Jerry! where is my brother?"

So called the young girl as she neared the two negro horsemen, one of whom quickly answered:

"He all right, missy; he coming along behind."

"Thank God!" and the flush came back to the face that had grown white with apprehension.

"Why did he not come on with you?" she asked.

"He stopped to look at a fresh trail, missy, coming down the valley, and told us to come on and say he be along soon."

"Where was this?"

"Whar ther ridge trail breaks down in ther valley, missy."

"That was a dozen miles from here."

"Yes, missy, more dan dat; but he all right, sure."

"I hope so; but he should soon have overtaken you, with his fleet horse."

"Maybe he make some discovery, missy, fer we don't find trails in dis valley often."

"True, and it alarms me, for that always implies danger. Perhaps I am over-excited to-day, but I have a terrible foreboding of evil."

"Don't feel dat way, Missy Luella; all going along right."

"You got all the supplies?"

"Yes, missy, eberything we went for an' wanted."

"When did you leave Perdition City?"

"Last night early, miss, and come on a dozen miles to camp by ourselves."

"You had no trouble there?"

"No, missy, Mars' Bert and us was all right, but ther war trouble for others. Dar's always trouble in dat ornery place."

"What was it?"

"Dar's a gent there dat dey calls The Man Killer; and he hev tarning up ther toes of four men already."

"What a terrible life to lead! Killed four men?"

"Yes, missy; life go cheap in Perdition City, you jes' bet!"

"Did you see this man?"

"No, missy; we went inter the Full Hand Saloon with Mars' Bert ter git a look at de Man Killer, but he hed gone; but we seen ther handsome gambler they calls Lon Langdon, and we seen Mars' Buffalo Bill, too, and—"

"Buffalo Bill, the great army scout?"

"Yes, missy, ther same as help Mars'

Bert and us out one day in a Injun scrimmage; you remembers dat?"

"I shall not forget him soon, nor will my brother."

"I would like much to see this man of whose daring deeds so much has been told."

"He mighty handsome, Missy Luella," averred Jerry, slyly, as he and Jack, now having halted before the store cabin, were busying themselves in removing the supplies from the pack animals.

"So my brother told me, and as noble-natured and big-hearted as he is handsome and brave, it is said."

"What was Buffalo Bill doing in that wicked hole of Perdition City?"

"He seemed ter me ter be jist lookin' around, nuffin' else."

"Did my brother speak to him?"

"No, missy."

"Were you tracked in leaving the settlement this time?"

"Yes, missy, but there wasn't but one or two of 'em as we seen."

Luella made no reply, but a shadow of anxiety crossed her face, and, turning, she walked back to her cabin and said:

"My brother halted to look at a strange trail, Quickstep; but he will soon be here; so keep dinner warm."

"Yes, missy," returned the negress, and to herself she mused:

"Missy Luella is more troubled dan she wishes to admit, and I don't blame her, for dis is a mighty bad land to live in, and she's expecting Mars' Bert to be killed every day."

"I'll shout Hallelujah when we can get out ob dis way-off wilderness."

Again Luella Lennox took up her book but to read only a few pages; her interest in it was gone. So she proceeded to look over the supplies brought; next told Quickstep to give the men their dinner, and then walked down toward the barrier.

She leaped the bars as lightly as a fawn, and, strolling out into the valley, looked up it long and earnestly.

As far as the eye could reach she discerned not a moving object.

Her brother was not in sight, and if within half a dozen miles she could see him, for here and there the trail ran in and out of the timber.

"I am foolish to worry, for often has my brother been a day and a night absent, but, to-day, this great dread of evil has seized upon me and I cannot throw it off."

Watching and waiting for half an hour longer, she then retraced her way to the hidden vale.

Declining to have her dinner alone, after half an hour more had passed, she called out:

"Jerry, you must go after my brother."

"Yes, missy."

"And take Jack, Jarvis, and Jute with you, for you all may be needed."

"Yes, missy; we'll go off at once."

Jerry gave his orders, and the four negroes—the two who had returned with the supplies and the two who had been working in the cabin—rode out of the vale well mounted and thoroughly armed—a daring band of black body guards.

All four were, by this time, much troubled in mind over their young master's detention.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLACK TRAILERS.

There was something decidedly striking in the appearance of the four negroes, who rode away from that lone house in the little valley.

All were tall, finely formed fellows, quick in movement, strong, and with faces plainly stamped with courage and decision, and so ever ready for any emergency.

All were dressed in buckskin, rather patterning after the Indian costume, even to moccasins, save that they wore black slouch hats, which gave them a somewhat sombre look.

Their horses evidently had been selected to match their own dark hue, for they were large, long-bodied animals, as black as jet.

Saddles and bridles were of the best; and, in addition to the usual belt of arms which each one wore was a fine rifle slung at the back, while, to add to their equipment, every one of them had a long bow and quiver of arrows.

Jerry was the leader—yet just enough to have a head to the little black band of trailers.

As they rode out from the hidden house, and took their way up the valley, they kept side by side, and betrayed to one another their alarm at their master's failure to come home.

He had left them, the two who had been with him explained to the others, only to examine a trail. All three had noticed the trail, where it crossed theirs. It had been made by a couple of horses and was very fresh.

In that valley men seldom ventured, and the horses ridden by those who had done so had been shod—which proved that their riders were not redskins, but white men.

But what white men had dared venture there, and why? What were they after?

The young horseman had been anxious to find out, and so he had told the two negroes to ride on, while he took a look at the trail, but would soon overtake them.

Why, then, had he failed to do so?

He certainly would not follow a trail far on a tired horse, and with no food with him, the four dusky body guard decided, and so they grew more and more alarmed for his safety as they rode on.

Spurring forward at a more rapid pace, they held the pace mile after mile, becoming each mile more anxious, as no sign of their master was discovered.

"I hain't a bit skeered fer Mars' Bert, if he only start out fresh on a trail, fer he knows what's what; but yer see he went off on them tracks fer only a few minutes, and he may hev been led into a ambush," Jerry had to say.

"Yes, dat what scares me. Sump'fin' gone wrong, dat's my guess. I jest wishes we hed waited fer him right dar!" Jack replied.

"Missy Luella is mighty frightened, I could see dat," Jarvis remarked, while Jute added:

"If he have been hurted, or kilt, den somebody's got ter suffer."

This was the opinion and decision of the four black braves, and they kept up their steady pace until the spot where Bert Lennox had gone off on the strange trail was reached.

Halting, with the eyes of experienced plainsmen, they began to take in the surroundings.

They saw that the trail of the two iron-shod horses crossed the one leading down the valley and came from the river.

There were the tracks of their master's horse, where he had turned off to investigate the strange trail, and the four negroes at once started to follow it.

To their surprise, it led back up the valley, after going a short distance.

This caused them to consider it strange indeed that their master should have followed it, when it led away from his home.

But there were the tracks of his horse, showing that he had certainly done so.

After going half a mile, the trail running almost parallel with the one leading through the valley, and several hundred rods from it, the four trail hunters came to a sudden halt.

At the same instant the eyes of the quartette had fallen upon a horse ahead, standing in some timber. His bridle rein was caught in the root of a tree, thus holding him fast.

Instantly the four recognized the horse; it was the animal their young master had been riding!

But where was the rider?

Quickly they spurred forward, and drew rein by the side of the horse.

They saw how the rein had been thrown over the head of the animal, and caught on the root of the tree.

The beast evidently had been on a trot, or gallop, when caught, for the root was half torn up by a sudden and strong pull upon it in halting him.

"Dat miserabul horse hev got away from Mars' Bert, and he am now walkin' home; dat am it," decided Jute.

But Jerry and Jack shook their heads, and the former said:

"Dat am his pard horse, and yer c'u'dn't drive him away from Mars' Bert; and, 'sides, we'd have met him—I tells you, boys, I is gittin' more scared, and—"

The words were checked by the sudden crack of a rifle, a quarter of a mile up the trail.

CHAPTER X.

THE SCOUT MYSTIFIED.

The ring of the rifle greatly startled the negroes.

"There's Mars' Bert now!" cried Jerry, and, calling to one of the others to bring on the horse they had just found, he rode rapidly off in the direction of the shot.

The others quickly followed. They looked for nothing else than to find Bert Lennox, perhaps firing at a deer or a turkey; instead they burst upon a strange scene, and all drew rein as though by order.

There before them, and not a hundred feet away, they beheld a newly made grave at the foot of a large tree, and lying upon it, in a limp heap, was a man. No other was seen!

Where was the one who had fired the shot?

Jerry, with ready presence of mind, called out:

"Jack, you and Jute find the man who did ther shootin', and you, Jarvis, come with me," and they dashed off toward a thicket near, while Jarvis, hitching his master's and his own horse, rode up to where Jerry now stood by the side of the fallen man.

Bending over, he turned the form face upward, and, as he did so, called out in alarm:

"Lor'—have—marcy! It's ther great scout, Jarvis!"

"Mars' Buf'ler Bill! So it am!" echoed Jarvis.

"But he hain't dead, t'ank de good Lordy!" cried Jerry, as he saw the scout move.

"Git my canteen, quick!" and Jerry took off the scout's hat, placed him upon his back, and continued, as he saw a red gash across his head:

"Dar's where de bullet hit him, but it glanced; I feel pretty sartin' o' dat!"

With real skill he examined the wound, saw that the bullet had cut the scalp to the skull, just back of the left ear, and, glancing, had gone on.

"No, de skull not cracked! See, he comin' round all right!" and the negro bathed the scout's face with the water from the canteen and was delighted to see the large eyes open and look into his own.

They closed again several times; then the broad breast heaved convulsively, and, with a sudden effort, the scout rose to his feet and grasped his revolver, but he reeled and would have fallen had not Jerry caught him and said:

"You all right now, Mars' Buf'ly Bill, for we is your friends, sah. Me and Jarvis and Jute and Jack done gone ter see who it was that shot you, sah."

The scout leant for support against the tree in which he had cut the name of Boyd Bernard.

He seemed to be collecting his thoughts, and his mind took in all that Jerry had said.

It was evident that the bullet had struck him a hard blow, confusing his mind for a while.

Then he raised his hand to his head,

felt the wound in an experienced way, and muttered:

"A close call, and well intended."

Then he turned to the negroes, took the canteen from Jerry's hand, and, after taking several hearty swallows, asked:

"Who fired that shot at me?"

"I duno, sah. We heerd it when down de valley lookin' for Mars' Bert. You seen him las' night, sah, at Perdicion City, with me and Jack."

"Yes, I remember. Where is he?"

"We is lookin' fer him, sah, and heerd dat shot, so come on here in a run, hop-in' to find him, but found you lying on dat new grave, same as you was dead."

"I sent Jack and Jute to find de man what did de shootin', and me and Jarvis stay by you."

Buffalo Bill passed his hands over his eyes several times.

There still seemed cobwebs obscuring his brain.

At last he said: "Yes, I'm getting my thoughts back now."

"I was fired at from across the canyon, miles back from here, and then the man who lies in this grave sought to kill me, but failed."

"I had buried him, and was cutting his name and date of death in this tree, when I heard a shot, felt a shock, and recall no more until I found you bending over me."

"Where is your master?"

"We don't know, sah. He stopped to look at a fresh trail, and we went on home; but, as he didn't come, as he said, we came back after him, sah."

"And have not found him?"

"No, sah; but we found his horse, the bridle rein caught, and we is gittin' scared about him, I tell you, sah, for it jes kill Miss Luella if we don't find him, dat's sure!"

"And who is Miss Luella?" thought Buffalo Bill, but he would not then ask the question.

He was dazed as to the shots fired at him, for it seemed that they had not ceased with the death of Boyd Bernard—Old Rocks.

Could it be that the negroes were really his foes, and were playing a part for some motive unseen by him?

Before more could be said, Jack and Jute were seen coming through the timber, and they were leading the scout's horse.

CHAPTER XI.

DIVIDED TRAILS.

Up rode the two blacks, leading the horse of Buffalo Bill, and showing surprise at finding the scout standing there with Jerry and Jarvis.

"Say, Jack, whar did you git that horse?" asked Jerry.

"Caught him over in de timber yan-der."

"Didn't yer see nothin' of nobody who did dat shootin' at Mars' Buf'ler Bill?"

"How do? Mars' Bill! I'se glad to see you, sah—no, Jerry, we didn't find nobody, but we struck a trail, and it-leaded over toward de river; den we came back to see if you had found Mars' Bert?"

"No, we hain't found him, and I done tole Mars' Buf'ler Bill about him."

"Tell me again, for I can think more clearly now," said the scout.

So Jerry told the whole story over, and how at last Luella Lennox, in anxiety for her brother, had sent them to search for him.

Buffalo Bill listened with deepest attention, and made no comment when Jerry spoke of Luella; but his mind was on what he heard, and he felt that he had made a discovery of importance. Of one thing he was convinced—that the negroes had not been his foes, had not been the ones to fire upon him.

Did he wish proof of this he could discover it through the trails, for Jack and Jute had reported having seen a fresh trail leading over to the river.

Asking particularly about this trail, Jack had told him that it was of one horse, iron shod. The animal had come down the valley, halted in the thicket, where the rider had dismounted and gone on foot to a point which the negro pointed out.

"And from that very spot certainly was fired the last shot at me. Are the tracks there?"

"Yes, sah; boot tracks, with a high heel, and dey shows dat de man went at a jump back for his horse, and dat he rode off at a run toward de ribber," said Jute.

"That means your coming frightened him off after he fired that shot at me."

"I owe my life to you, boys, I feel certain, for, stunned as I was, he would have come here and finished his work. I will not forget you, lads!"

The scout held out his hand and grasped each one of the four honest palms extended toward him, Jerry remarking:

"We hain't forgot what all of us owes you, Mars' Bill."

"But hain't it bad about Mars' Bert, and what has become of him, I wonder?"

"You have found his horse, you say?"

"Yes, sah; ober dar," pointing.

"Then we must go there and pick up his trail."

"Let me fix up your head, sah, fust, for it's still bleedin', and I is a doctor if I is black."

"And no doubt a good one. I'll be glad to have you dress the wound, as I have arnica and bandages in my saddle roll."

"So has I, sah; neber goes widout 'em."

The wound was skillfully dressed; then the party turned to mount their horses, when Jerry, with a glance at the grave, said:

"You kill him, Mars' Bill?"

"Yes; he sought to kill me."

"Yes, sah. Mars' Boyd Bernard, hain't he de man as is called de Rover?"

"Yes; just that man. Did you boys know him?"

"No, sah; only seen him at Perdicion City, and heerd tell of him as a bad man."

"He done gone on his last trail now, fer shure."

"Yes, but I never heard of the Rover as a bad man, and was surprised when I saw who it was that sought to kill me. I regarded him, only as a roving gold hunter."

"Dar's many, sah, as is man hunters as well as gold hunters, Mars' Bill," replied Jerry, significantly, and the scout felt that he knew more of Boyd Bernard than he would admit.

To the spot they rode where Bert Lennox's horse had been found, and the scout's keen eyes were not long in discovering the foot tracks of the rider.

It was on the trail of the two iron-shod horses, and Buffalo Bill said:

"It appears to me as though he had dismounted, his horse had got away from him, and he continued on foot, in following the trail."

"Does it lead in the direction of his home?"

"Yes, sah; it could go to the base of the range, and so on down de valley."

"Then, being on foot, and some distance off, you doubtless missed him when you came here in search of him."

"Yes, sah, dat's a fact, and Mars' Bert am now at home, I reckon."

"Perhaps; but it would be well for you to follow on his trail."

"Yes, sah; but won't you come, too, for I know Mars' Bert won't git mad if you goes home wid us?"

"No, thank you; I have a trail to follow, too, as I wish to know who it was who fired that shot at me which so nearly called in my chips."

"Good-by, boys, and again I tell you that I owe you my life."

Mounting his horse again, with a wave of the hand Buffalo Bill rode back over

the trail to pick up that of his intended slayer.

As he rode along a sudden idea flashed upon him, and he rode straight off toward the grave of Boyd Bernard, the Rover.

CHAPTER XII.

THREE TRAILS.

"How strange that I should have forgotten all about the horse of Bernard!" mused Buffalo Bill as he rode toward the grave by the tree.

There stood the rifle, the weapons, and what else he had taken from the body, just as he had bundled them up to carry away with him.

Taking in the situation, he located the position of his assassin when he had fired the shot at him, and then rode off in search of the Rover's horse.

He found the animal a quarter of a mile back in the timber, and staked out, his saddle and bridle lying near.

It was a fine beast, the equipments of the best, and the scout saw that there was a large blanket roll.

This he opened, to discover a fine gray slouch hat, a velvet coat, white corduroy pants, and a pair of stylish cavalry boots.

Buffalo Bill was always known as a man who dressed well, wearing a picturesque frontier garb, but upon this occasion he had left the fort clad for rough work, garbed in buckskin leggings, moccasins, and hunting coat.

Something seemed flashing through his mind as he stood there looking at the handsome suit in Bernard's outfit, and what it was found vent in words:

"I'll have just time to reach the river and camp before night comes on, and at daylight I'll strike out on that trail."

"I think there was enough resemblance between Bernard and myself for me to play his part, for I cannot get it out of my mind that the last man who fired upon me was his pard, and was the one who sent that shot across the canyon, too."

"Let me see: We were about the same size—the hat fits, so do the boots. Yes, they fit as though made for me, and the clothes will all be O. K."

"I'll just rig up in his outfit to-morrow, ride his horse, and see what the result will be when I reach the end of the trail."

"But one thing puzzles me greatly—that he had no money on his person. He certainly did have a large roll of it when playing with Gambler Lon Langdon at Perdicion City last night. What can have become of it? I must look again."

The most thorough search failed to reveal the money, and, packing up the dead man's traps, Buffalo Bill mounted and rode away, leading the Rover's horse.

He struck the trail reported by the negroes of the man who had fired upon him, followed it to the river, and there went into camp just at dark, as he had planned.

He was up early the next morning, dressed himself, as he had intended, in Boyd Bernard's clothes, mounted the dead man's horse, and, with his own in lead, started off on the trail.

It followed a deer run to the river, crossed, and then held on up the valley.

It was easily followed, for no attempt had been made at concealment, so Cody pushed on at a good pace until noon, when he halted for dinner and rest.

He had made up his mind to one thing—that the trail led to a camp of miners on the Stage Trail, some forty miles from the fort.

Just beyond where he camped he saw that two other horses had joined the one he was following. The three had halted for awhile, but had gone on together.

The direction the others had traveled was an indication that they had come out of the valley which he had just quitted. From this, the scout believed them to be in league with the one who had sought his life. In fact, he felt that he

was beginning to trace all three of the shots fired at him.

Continuing on, just as he had surmised, the scout ascertained that the trails led to the little mining camp, and he mused:

"There is where I will find my recent foes, and it is well to know them."

Approaching the camp, Buffalo Bill observed the three horses he had been trailing hitched in front of the half store, half saloon, and dismounting he determined to boldly enter and confront his foes.

Just as he came to this conclusion he saw Trump Gale, the storekeeper, coming out of the cabin, and, knowing him well, he called out:

"Ho, Trump! Who is inside?"

"Why, Buffalo Bill! You are dressed up like a dandy in velvet! At first I thought you were Boyd Bernard—Old Rocks, the Rover."

"It's all right, Trump. I'm wearing Bernard's plumage, and for a purpose. But who is in your den?"

"Three mighty hard citizens, Bill, who just came in."

"I want them, and I may need your aid."

"Just as you say, Bill, if you do. It will be shooting, sure, for they are hard ones."

"All right, if it must be."

"I'll go in by this door; you enter by the one you came out of, but leave all to me, unless you see that I am getting worsted."

"That's your style, Buffalo Bill, to tackle big odds," muttered Trump Gale, and he returned to the cabin by one door just as the scout entered by the other.

With a revolver in each hand, Buffalo Bill suddenly confronted the three men in the saloon and called out:

"Hands up, or I pull trigger!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DOUBLE ACCUSATION.

When Buffalo Bill entered the saloon at Camp Tarry he saw only three men there, for the place was almost deserted save at night, when the men returned from work, and at the time when the stage came in.

Whether Trump Gale knew who the three men were or not, he certainly showed a desire to help Buffalo Bill, for he promptly appeared in one door as the scout advanced through the other. Trump's hand was on the revolver in his belt, but which he wore concealed under his coat.

One of the three men was standing up, talking earnestly to the other two, who were seated at a table, and none of them had taken notice of Buffalo Bill until his words startled them, and all saw that they were covered.

Though three in number, and Buffalo Bill had but two revolvers, each of the trio realized that he was lined, and not one drew a weapon, though the man standing up did drop his left hand upon his knife hilt.

For a few seconds the situation was critical, but in that time Cody had taken the measure of his men and felt that he was master of the situation.

The two sitting down he did not remember to have seen before, but the tall fellow with his hand on his knife hilt Cody knew as one Red Knife Joe—so named because he was a terror with his bowie knife, and, using his left hand, as he always did in an encounter, he usually had his foe at a disadvantage, which he never failed to make use of.

"Well, what's this row about, Buffalo Bill? Fer I wants to know bad, and I just advises you ter go slow, as yer might git the wrong pig by the ear."

It was Red Knife Joe who spoke, in a slow, drawling tone.

"When I go after game, Red Knife Joe, I know what I want, and you are the right pig, in this case."

"Up with your hands, or I'll kill you," replied the scout sternly.

"As yer has ther drop on me, I hain't

fool enough ter refuse; but I warn yer that you is making a big mistake."

"I will answer for all mistakes, Red Knife Joe. Up with your hands there!" to the other two men, who also obeyed. "Trump Gale, will you disarm these three men?"

"Is you going back on us, Trump Gale?" cried Joe.

"I obey orders, pards, when they come from an officer of the Government, as I know Mr. Cody to be," replied the store keeper. So he at once disarmed the three, laying their belts upon the table nearest the scout.

"Red Knife Joe, you rode that big chestnut horse outside, did you not?"

"I did, and what of it?"

"I have tracked him from Shadow Valley to this point, so you are the man who thought you had killed me, but you see I am very much alive—yes, your face pales again, as it did awhile since when you saw me, for you were so unnerved at seeing, as you supposed, my spirit, you had not the strength to draw and throw that ugly knife of yours, as you otherwise would have done."

"It's a lie! I hain't been near Shadow Valley. I don't go there."

"No, for the valley has a bad name, and only to kill some one or to rob would take you there."

"It wasn't my horse you tracked there."

"I'll stake my life on it that it was yours, if you rode the big chestnut; and—"

"My horse is a claybank."

"And mine is a gray," called out first one and then the other of Red Knife's pards.

"Yes, and you joined this man in the trail and came on here with him."

"I do not accuse you of being with him in Shadow Valley, but birds of a feather are found in company, and I have an idea that you two are of the same stripe as Red Knife."

"What does yer mean by that, Buffalo Bill?" growled Red Knife Joe viciously.

"I mean that you tried to assassinate me, thought you had done so, but fled when help came and came here, joining your pards on the way."

"It hain't so."

"I say it is, and I wish to know why you sought to kill me."

"I didn't, but after yer treatment of me ter day its going ter be war to ther knife and knife to ther hilt atween us, Buffalo Bill," savagely spoke the accused man.

"If you do not hang for what you have already done, I am willing," was the reply, and the scout added:

"I accuse you of attempted murder, and shall take you to the fort for trial. If I am not away off the trail, I'll find even more serious charges than that against you."

The man's face grew livid, but suddenly he started, and with great energy shouted:

"And I accuse you, Buffalo Bill, of having killed Boyd Bernard, the Rover Miner, and of having robbed him."

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUDDEN ATTACK.

Even Trump Gale started at the bold accusation of Red Knife Joe against Buffalo Bill.

The man spoke as though he thought the scout would shrink with terror from before him, and therefore had prepared to make a spring for his weapons, and thus in his turn become master of the situation.

But Buffalo Bill did not change color under the charge; rather, he smiled pleasantly.

But his eyes were busy, and had been upon the other two men when Red Knife made his accusation.

He noticed that they did not appear surprised, on the contrary, they apparently believed that Boyd Bernard really had been killed by the scout, and their expressions seemed to say:

"Now we hold trumps, Buffalo Bill, so what are you going to do about it?"

That the scout read them aright was shown by the words of one of them, who broke in with:

"Yes, you killed Boyd Bernard, Buffalo Bill."

Trump Gale glanced anxiously at the army scout for an explanation.

Cody was still smiling, but at that repetition of Red Knife's charge his face grew serious, and he said:

"Yes, I did kill Boyd Bernard down in Shadow Valley."

"I supposed him to be an honest miner, but I found him to be an assassin, for he ambushed me, fired upon me, and I was the better shot, that is all."

"I buried him near where he fell, and marked his grave, and—"

"Why, you have got his clothes on now," asseverated the big ruffian.

"Yes, Red Knife, I have."

"And you robbed him."

"Well, perhaps I did, for all he had of value I took and have with me, along with his horse; but he had no money or valuables to speak of, only a silver watch and a few dollars."

"It's a lie, for he were loaded with money," shouted Red Knife.

"So he were."

"That's true; he had a big roll o' boodle," chimed in the other two.

Then Buffalo Bill smiled again.

He had a trap to spring, and he sprung it.

"How do you all know about Boyd Bernard?"

The men were silent, and Trump Gale saw the situation—saw how the scout had let these three men have their say to catch them—and he spoke:

"Yes, if you were not in the Shadow Valley, Joe, how do you know about Bernard's death, and how do your pards, there, also know?"

The men understood that they had "put their foot in it," so to speak.

Buffalo Bill laughed lightly and remarked: "I gave you men rope and you have hung yourselves."

"You, Red Knife, denied having been in the Shadow Valley, and yet you saw me kill Boyd Bernard there, and bury him. You were there to meet him, or were with him, and watched me bury him."

"You then fired on me, intending, I suppose, to avenge your pard, and get what I had of value about me, or what you supposed I had taken from his body, for he did have a large roll of money in Perdition City, for I saw it."

"Frightened off by those who came to my rescue, you fled for your life. Whether these two men were in the valley or not, I cannot swear; but, if so, they were tracking me."

"They have given themselves dead away in knowing that I killed Boyd Bernard, and also in being aware that he had boodle with him, thus proving that they were his and your pards, members of your band of cutthroats."

"As it is, you three men go to the fort with me."

"And there you shall answer for the murder of Boyd Bernard," cried Red Knife Joe.

"I am ready to do that, Joseph."

"And you'll hang!"

"Not on the testimony of a cutthroat like you!"

"Trump Gale, may I ask you to get down three lariats from the pin yonder and rope these men, while I hold them lined? And please search them, too, for I may find something valuable about them."

"I've got to obey," said Trump Gale, as though offering an apology to those who had doubtless been good customers of the bar and store.

"Not be searched," suddenly cried one of the men, and seizing Trump Gale unexpectedly, he used him as a breast-work and rushed him toward the table where the three belts of arms lay, and the storekeeper, taken at disadvantage, was powerless to resist.

It was a critical moment for Buffalo Bill, for, as his attention was turned to the daring act of the man who had seized Trump Gale, Red Knife lifted a chair and hurled it full at the scout, while the other grasped a table and rushed with it as a shield toward the one with the weapons upon it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRIO'S OFFER.

Had the heavy chair hurled by Red Knife Joe at Buffalo Bill struck him it would have knocked the weapon from his hand, perhaps have felled him to the floor; but, with surprising agility, Buffalo Bill leaped to one side, and the chair was smashed against the bar.

The spring which had saved him took Buffalo Bill toward the table upon which lay the belts of arms, and which was now the centre of attraction for all in the saloon.

The man using Trump Gale as a shield had reached it, and his hand was stretched forth to grasp a weapon, when the scout's foot sent the table flying over, burying the arms beneath it, and, just as the second man came rushing up with his table before him as a guard, Red Knife had seized another chair to hurl it.

This sudden attack seemed to have unnerved Trump Gale, for he was at the mercy of his captor, and for a moment it looked as though the trio had won the game so desperately undertaken, though why Buffalo Bill did not fire no one but himself could tell.

But the scout, now wholly on his mettle, struck the table fair in the centre with his foot as it was held up as a guard, and the man behind it went down with it on top of him.

Almost at the same moment the scout tripped the man holding Trump Gale, and, dealing him a blow at the same time, sent him down with the unfortunate store keeper on top of him.

"Now, hands up, Red Knife!"

The man addressed halted, with triumph almost in his grasp—halted to obey the stern command. Up went his hands, while he called out:

"We're beat, pards! It's no go ag'in' this man!"

The other two were of the same opinion, for they lay where they had fallen, while Trump Gale was still held down on top of his captor, to use as a foil against a bullet or blow.

"Release that man," ordered the scout, who saw that, held from behind as he was, Trump could not aid himself, or even draw a weapon.

"Yer won't shoot me if I does?" whined the ruffian, lying on his back and clinging on for dear life, trying to make the head, body and legs of the store keeper protect his own person.

"I'll shoot you if you do not," answered the scout—"mighty quick, too!"

Gale was released with alacrity, and he arose white-faced and trembling, with excitement, dread and rage.

"Now, rope them, Mr. Gale."

"I'll do it curse 'em! and about their neck, too!"

"No; only secure their arms behind them, and leave one end to rope them to their saddles when they mount."

"Why on earth didn't you shoot, Buffalo Bill, for I thought they'd got away with us?" said Gale.

For two reasons, Mr. Gale, the first being that I would not fire on an unarmed man, and had I done so the chances were that you would have been hurt, for the man who held you was the most dangerous."

"Well, I thank you for not firing, Mr. Cody, but some day your generosity will lose you your life," asserted Trump Gale; but that he appreciated the scout's noble motive there was no doubt.

The three men were bound, and securely, for Trump Gale was in no humor to be trifled with, after having been used

as he had been, for a cushion to catch bullets. He was "mad clear through," and showed it.

"I tell you, Buffalo Bill, you need not be afraid of these fellows getting away when I finish with them."

"Not too tight, Gale, for I do not wish to cause them suffering, and I will not let them escape."

"Now, give us some dinner, while I stake the horses out for a feed, and then I'll start with them to the fort," said the scout.

Trump Gale was known to always give a square meal at his cabin, and passengers by coach never went away hungry.

He had a good Chinese cook, and was a great hunter, so provided his table with the best, for he had his store to draw on for groceries and the forests and plains for game.

He went out to order dinner, and upon his return Buffalo Bill started off to see about the horses of his captives and his own and Bernard's, leaving the store keeper to stand guard over the prisoners.

Hardly had the scout disappeared before Red Knife Joe said:

"Say, Trump Gale, we has been good friends of yours."

"As far as I knows."

"We has drunk at yer bar, eat at yer table, bought at yer store, and allus paid good money."

"Yes."

"Yer don't want ter lose good customers, does yer?"

"No."

"Then fix our ropes so we kin slip 'em off."

"So you can kill Buffalo Bill?"

"Well, we want ter git free."

"If I could help you without harm to Cody, I would; but he's too square a man to let harm come to him," was the answer.

CHAPTER XVI.

TRUMP GALE'S VISITOR.

The three men looked at Trump as he uttered these words in reply to Red Knife Joe, and then glanced at each other significantly.

They each understood the glance, for Red Knife said:

"Say Trump Gale, you love money, don't you?"

"What fool don't?"

"But you sets bigger value on it than most men, I has heard."

"I wouldn't be risking life out here if it wasn't to make money to some day give me a better life elsewhere."

"You is stage agent, saloon keeper, store keeper, landlord of the eating house and boss of the gamblin' at nights, while I has heard yer has a claim or two, though not of much account."

"Well, what then?"

"Now, they all don't pay you down any big money in a lump."

"They pay pretty well."

"But I mean ter pay big money, and we has about us some five thousand in the best of bank bills, which goes into your pocket if you jist slips these ropes, let us tie you and skip before the scout gits back."

"Pards, I love money, yes; but if you were free you d not skip, but would kill Buffalo Bill, and I'm not that kind of a man."

"You protect him, but let him take to the fort to hang."

"That is your lookout, not mine, for you gave yourselves away, as I heard when he accused you of trying to kill him, and he has the mark of your bullet on his head."

"No. I am a law-abiding man, and though I'd help you if I could, for the money there would be in it for me, mind you, I will not turn you loose to simply kill Buffalo Bill, as I know is your intention."

Red Knife Joe muttered a curse, which his comrades chorused, and then he said:

"Well, I warn you, as I did him, that ther day o' judgment will come fer you too, fer I hain't hanged yet."

"Nor me either."

"No, we is livin' yet," supplemented the others.

Then they put their heads together, whispered for a moment, and Red Knife again spoke:

"Say, Trump, we'll make it ten thousand each, for we has the money with us, if you'll jist let us skip out that door and take to the canyon to hide."

"We won't even ask for our weapons; but when Buffalo Bill is gone you come and look us up, and give us back our arms and horses, or others if Cody has took 'em."

"Come! You gets a cool roll of ten thousand if you'll do that much for us, and we'll jist tie you and gag you, to show that you didn't help us. Talk quick!"

"And when you tie me you'll wait for Buffalo Bill and kill him. Oh, no; you can't have the chance!"

"You can keep our weapons."

"I take no chances where his life is at stake," was the reply.

The men groaned, and their heads were together planning another bribe to spring upon the store keeper, when Buffalo Bill strode into the saloon.

Soon after dinner was served, the men eating under the cover of Trump Gale's revolver.

When the meal was over they were bound again and made to mount their horses. They were secured to their saddles beyond all possibility of escape.

"Say, Gale, I only wish to thank you, for I heard the temptation you resisted, as I confess I wished to be sure about you, and so waited outside, knowing these scoundrels would spring a bribe upon you."

"I can trust you now, though, and you may rely upon my friendship; and let me add, you have been under suspicion for some time, but your conduct to-day squares all reports against you, rest assured."

Buffalo Bill spoke in a low, earnest tone, and out of hearing of the prisoners.

Gale flushed and paled by turns at the scout's words, but was pleased to feel that he had won the friendship of Buffalo Bill.

As the fort scout rode away with his prisoners, the storekeeper thus commented:

"Now, what if I had been tempted by that offer? They would never have gotten away, and I would now have been keeping them company on the way to the fort."

"Honesty is the best policy, after all, though it is said every man has his price. If I have mine, I am glad to say those fellows did not bid high enough."

"Buffalo Bill is a man that, somehow, can't be downed, for he comes out on top every time, and, as people say, he certainly bears a charmed life."

"Why, I thought sure, an hour ago, that he had not one chance in a thousand, but look how he won the game!"

"Red Knife Joe has been a good customer of mine, a very good customer; but I guess he's about come to the end of his trail, now Buffalo Bill is onto him, for he'll find out what I have half suspected about him. Ah! here comes a horseman! It is the gentleman I have seen at Perdicion City, and whom they call the Man Killer, though I believe he writes himself down as Gabriel Grandin."

"I don't know whether I am glad to see him or not," and Trump Gale turned to greet his visitor, who just then rode up to the cabin.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WARNING NOTE.

The horse ridden by Gabriel Grandin, the stranger from Perdicion City, had been hard ridden; he hung his head low, as though fagged out.

The rider's strong-lined face, too, showed fatigue, for it was pale and haggard.

But he bowed pleasantly to the saloon keeper as he said:

"I would like to get a good meal and a fresh horse, if you can furnish me with one. I will pay liberally."

"You are Mr. Grandin, I believe?"

"Yes; do you know me?" asked the stranger, with some surprise.

"I saw you out at Perdicion City some time ago, when I was there, and they told me your name."

"And much else I suppose," said Gabriel Grandin, smiling again.

"They said you were a man killer."

"Circumstances often make us what we would not be. This is Camp Scurry, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you the keeper here, may I inquire?"

"I am, sir, Trump Gale, storekeeper, stage agent, and landlord, all at your service, for I can give you a square meal, and also a good horse, which I will sell to you, or trade with you for yours."

"I will not part with my animal, sir, for I know his worth; but he is very tired now, and I wish to push on to the fort, so will hire your horse for the ride."

"Dismount, sir, and you shall be taken care of."

Trump at once gave orders to the Chinese for a good dinner; then he called to a half-breed Indian to take the tired horse to the corral, and put the saddle upon one of the best in the herd.

"You are something of a stranger in these parts, I take it," suggested Gale, anxious to draw his visitor out and get certain much desired information.

"Yes, something," was replied.

"Going to the fort, you say?"

"Yes; that is my purpose."

"Know the trail?"

"Start me right and I can find it."

"Well, if you can follow a trail, there is a fresh one all the way there, for Buffalo Bill rode that way an hour ago with three prisoners."

"Buffalo Bill, the army scout?" asked Grandin.

"Yes, and the king of 'em all, too, Mr. Grandin."

"Buffalo Bill was here, you say?" he repeated, as if in doubt.

"An hour ago, sir."

"And has gone to the fort?"

"Yes, as I said—with three prisoners."

"That is the very man I am after," and the stranger spoke with unmistakable emphasis.

Trump eyed him closely and suspiciously, and spoke:

"See here, pard, they told me you were a man killer, and I guess you've won the title fairly; but if you are after Buffalo Bill's scalp, then I advise you to just take the trail back to Perdicion City, or you'll go to a place of the same name further south, quicker than you have any idea of."

The stranger looked at the station agent in a peculiar manner, and seemed impressed by what Trump intimated, but remarked, in an off-hand way:

"Hard on me, but I have nothing against Buffalo Bill, to cause me to seek his scalp, as you call it. I do not even know the man by sight, though I have heard much of him."

"Were you in Perdicion City two nights ago?" asked Gale, confident that the man was playing a part now.

"I was."

"Buffalo Bill was there."

"I did not see him."

"He's a pretty large man, and a dandy for looks; cuts quite a figure in a crowd, and men generally know when he's around, quiet as he is."

"Still, I do not recall having seen him."

"You'd have remembered him if you had."

"Had he been pointed out to me, yes."

"He's not a man, once seen, to forget. Had you been here a couple of hours sooner, you'd have seen him in evidence pretty strong, for he roped in three men who are mighty bad ones, I can tell you, and has taken them on to the fort, prisoners."

"Who were they?" quickly asked the guest.

"Red Knife Joe and two of his pards."

"I don't know Red Knife Joe, at least by that name."

"Well, if you are after Buffalo Bill for harm, take my advice and go the back trail."

"My dear sir, I am seeking Buffalo Bill for a purpose which I will settle with him when we meet," and Gabriel Grandin seemed anxious to drop the conversation as to the scout. Soon after, Shing Lo, the Chinaman, sounded his whistle to announce that the meal was ready, and Trump led the way to the kitchen cabin, where the stranger seemed surprised at the very good repast set before him.

He was satisfied, also, with the horse which the half-breed led up for him, and, mounting, rode away, following the directions of the station master, who added another warning that he had better not go if he was after Buffalo Bill's scalp.

Hardly had the horseman passed from sight when Trump Gale ordered the half-breed, whom he called Utah, to mount a horse, and, flanking the trail to the fort, to go there with all speed and take a note to Buffalo Bill.

It was a note of warning to the scout, telling him that he, Trump Gale, believed Gabriel Grandin, the man killer, was on his trail, and to watch out for him.

Having seen Utah dash away with the note, Trump felt that he had done his duty in putting the scout on his guard, for he looked upon Grandin, as a very dangerous man.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MEETING IN THE MOONLIGHT.

Buffalo Bill rode away with his three prisoners at a good pace, anxious to reach the fort before nightfall.

Red Knife Joe rode immediately behind the scout, the others following him, and one lariat leading all the horses.

In this file they traveled for awhile, when Joe called out that he would like a talk if Buffalo Bill would hear what he had to say.

"Ride up alongside, Red Knife, and I will hear you," answered back the scout, but he added with a smile, as though divining what was in Red Knife's mind:

"You know I am not to be bribed."

"Every man's got his price," growled Red Knife, angry at the scout's reading his intention.

"That may be, but my price is more than you can put up."

But the prisoner decided to make the offer, nevertheless. So he talked to the point, and urgently, but all to no use, for the scout told him flatly that he could not be bought to do what he regarded as a dishonor to himself and treachery to his government.

"If you can clear yourselves at the fort, well and good. I shall only tell what I know and what I suspect; if you cannot clear yourselves, then you must take the full consequences of your crimes," said the scout, decisively.

This ended the conversation, the prisoners making a threat in chorus of what they would do when they got free.

But threats never disturbed the scout; certainly they did not in that instance. His experience had taught him that threatened men are long-lived. His early learned life philosophy was to wait for trouble to come before worrying about it.

At last the fort was reached, the prisoners lapsing into a sullen silence as it came into sight.

Going at once to Headquarters, Buffalo Bill made his report of the happenings since he had been over to Perdition City to arrest several of the most lawless of the hangers-on there.

He told Colonel Gardner that the principal one of the tough lot had been killed by the stranger known as Gabriel Grandin, the man killer, but that he felt sure

that, in Red Knife Joe and his two companions he had happened upon another lawless gang.

Of his trailing the young man of Shadow Valley and his black pards, what had followed, the killing of Boyd Bernard and his other adventures, the scout had no more to say than to state the actual facts, adding that it was his intention to at once take the trail again, as there was much that he wished to find out.

Colonel Gardner listened most attentively to all that his trusted scout and agent had to say, and then addressed him: "I feel now, Cody, that you know what you are about, and that, in the end, all will come out as you have planned, though as yet you have not let me into your secret fully."

"These prisoners I will hold, and will not now take notice of your killing of this man Boyd Bernard, who was supposed to be a clever fellow, and all right."

"If you need aid you know that you have but to send for what force you may require."

"As to this man killer you tell me of, he appears to be some avenger, and a mystery, as also is the young gold hunter of Shadow Valley, and his black companions."

"What mystery then is in it. All, I leave you to fathom."

Thanking the colonel for his trust in him, Buffalo Bill went to his cabin, put away the things belonging to Boyd Bernard, and attired himself in his own picturesque frontier costume.

That done, he saddled his best horse, and, going by the guardhouse to see that his prisoners were all right, was told by Colonel Plummer, the officer of the day, that a search of the three men had disclosed a very large sum of money in their possession. Bundles of greenbacks newly issued.

"Just have the paymaster seal it all up, Captain Plummer, in your presence, please, and keep it, for it is important," said Buffalo Bill.

The army scout soon after was riding away from the fort, well equipped for a long trail, when he saw a horseman coming in the distance, and riding at full speed, as if in haste.

"It is Trump Gale's Indian, Utah," he muttered; and soon after the half-breed dashed up and handed him the note which the storekeeper had written him.

The scout read it, gave Utah a gold coin, and said:

"Tell Mr. Gale I thank him."

The Indian wheeled his horse and dashed off, not keeping to the trail, while Buffalo Bill continued on the track, as before, not at all disquieted, apparently, by the station-agent's warning.

Night had come on; the man killer was missing. Cody had made up his mind to meet the man killer and discover then and there what he had against him.

He had ridden a couple of miles, when he rode over a rise of the plain to suddenly come upon four horsemen.

Drawing a revolver, he halted and regarded them carefully.

"They are either wearing black masks, or they are the Black Brigade of Shadow Valley," said Buffalo Bill, boldly holding his position.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LOST GOLD HUNTER.

The four black horsemen, who had rescued Buffalo Bill in Shadow Valley from the man who had fired upon him as he stood by Boyd Bernard's grave, went off, as we have recorded, on the trail toward the Hidden Horne, up the little canyon, with full confidence that their master would be found there upon their arrival.

They had found his horse, as already recorded, but that gave them no alarm, for they decided that the animal had merely escaped from his rider, and un-

able to catch him, Bert Lennox had started off on foot for the cabin.

That decided, they turned their own horses' heads homeward, but not meeting him upon the trail, concluded that he must have followed the base of the hills as a short cut to the house.

It was growing dark when the four Sable Samsons rode up to the barrier leading into the valley.

"Jerry, if Mars' Bert come home he didn't take de bars down," observed Jute.

"How yer know, Jute?"

"They is jist as I lef' 'em."

This seemed to startle the darkies, and they hurried on up to the cabin.

There was Luella Lennox, and she called out in the darkness:

"Are you there, brother?"

"Hain't Mars' Bert home, missy?" Jerry asked.

"No; oh, no! Did you not find him?"

"We got his horse, Missy Luella, and

"Come and tell me all there is to tell," I dreaded this very thing," said Luella Lennox in a voice quivering with emotion.

The four negroes now stood before her, while Jerry told the story as it had happened.

Luella had thrown herself in a large chair, as though unable to stand, and Quickstep stood by her side.

In the eyes of the four brave blacks there were tears, for they had begun to fear the worst.

But Jerry said hopefully:

"It war a long way, Missy, and Mars' Bert is on foot, while we war ridin'. I think I'll go back and meet him."

"Do so, Jerry, you and Jute, and the others will stay here. Take the dogs, for they may find him if anything has happened."

Jerry called to two large dogs lying outside; Jute got fresh horses, one extra being taken along saddled and bridled for the missing man; then they started back on the search, the moon having risen and lighting their way.

When they had gone Luella Lennox called to Jarvis and said:

"Now tell me of your meeting with this scout, Buffalo Bill."

Jarvis told the story once again.

"You had already found my brother's horse?"

"Yes, missy."

"Caught by the root of a tree?"

"Yes, missy."

"And heard the shot fired at the scout?"

"We did, missy, and went dere a huntin' it, fer we thought it was Mars' Bert in trouble, or shooting big game."

"And the scout was lying unconscious on the grave?"

"Yes, missy; he war dat!"

"But not seriously hurt?"

"He didn't seem ter mind it, Miss Luella, arter he come round all right."

"Jerry, he doctored him up, and he say he as good as new."

"And he said that he had killed this man, Boyd Bernard?"

"Yes, missy, and bury him right dar."

"He had been fired on from ambush?"

"Yes, missy; Scout Cody tell us ne war shot at three times in different places."

"Then the man he killed was dogging him to take his life?"

"Somebody else, too, Miss Luella, for he war fust shot at about de canyon, afore he come to de valley; den he war shot at down in de valley, and next time after he kill de man he bury."

"Three times, and as he was fired at after killing Boyd Bernard, it proves that there was more than one man shadowing him?"

"Yes, missy, dat's de fac'."

"But you could not find the man who fired the shot that so nearly proved fatal to Buffalo Bill?"

"No, missy, but I reckons dat Mars' Bill find him all right, mighty soon; and oh, my, when he do!"

"He done went off on his trail, arter seeing us start for home."

"I hope no harm may befall him; but this man, Boyd Bernard, I have heard my brother speak of; he had seen him at Perdition City, and thought he was not a bad fellow."

"So all say, missy, but he certain did try ter kill Scout Cody."

"Well, Jarvis, you and Jack go to bed now and get what rest you can, for, should Jerry and Jute not find my brother, I wish you to accompany me in a search to-morrow."

"Yes, missy, dat we will."

Soon after Luella retired, for she wished to get strength for what she dreaded was before her, and Quickstep also threw herself down upon a buffalo robe and also went to sleep.

It was just daylight when the two searchers returned with the dogs.

They had not found the gold hunter, and the scent was too old for the dogs to take.

After breakfast Luella and the other two negroes started off on the search; but they returned by noon, and the young girl said:

"Jerry, you all must go after Buffalo Bill; only he can find my brother."

CHAPTER XX.

THE MEETING IN THE TRAIL.

In her despair at the unsuccessful search for her brother, the thought had suddenly flashed upon Luella Lennox that Buffalo Bill was the man to appeal to for aid.

No sooner than thought of was her idea made known, and she was glad to see that her four faithful guardians at once sided with her, while Quickstep "felt it in her bones" that the scout was the man to find her master.

"Having decided upon asking the scout's aid, Luella said:

"You all know why my brother came to this wilderness to live, and hid us away here in this lone valley.

"You know also that his purpose has not yet been accomplished, and I feel deeply that in the eighteen months that we have been here not a murmur has come from any of you."

"We all right, missy; we likes it here," averred Jerry.

"'Deed we does," echoed the others, while Quickstep remarked:

"I reckon whar you and Mars' Bert can live we can, too, and not grumble. We isn't dat kind of low down trash, missy."

"You are just as good as gold, and what fortune comes to me you shall share, you all know, for your deep devotion."

"All along I have known our danger, and have dreaded that cruel foes would dog us even here, but my brother has held no such fear, and was, I think, too reckless.

"Now the dreaded blow has come upon us, and I feel that we should not delay, but at once seek the aid of this greatest of scouts, to find my brother.

"He can do it, I feel assured, for I cannot believe that Bert is dead. Rather, I think, that he has been captured, kidnapped, for those foes who would wish to find him care not to take his life, at least not now."

"Dem Injuns is what I is 'feared of Missy Luella."

"Have you seen any Indian signs in the valley, Jerry? We did not this morning."

"No, missy, we seen no signs."

"Then he has not been captured by Indians, that is certain.

"But you mount your best horses, go well supplied with food, and start out to find Buffalo Bill, for he has doubtless gone to the fort."

"Of course, we have kept our stay here a secret as much as possible, and must continue to do so; but you can tell the scout enough to let him know that my brother has been kidnapped, and ask him to find him."

"Me and Jute go at once, missy."

"Yes, and Jarvis and Jack also."

"But that don't leave nobody ter take care of you, missy, 'ceptin' Quickstep!"

"Quickstep and I can shoot as well as any of you, as you know, so we will be quite able to take care of ourselves.

"We will fasten up the barrier, and I will leave one of the dogs there day and night on watch. That will make us doubly secure."

It was evident that the four did not care to leave the hidden home unprotected, but they obeyed the command of their young mistress and started upon their search for Buffalo Bill.

Luella and Quickstep went to the barrier in the narrow pass with them, and secured the bars, as was the custom at night, while one of the dogs was placed on duty there.

They watched the four ride away, then the loneliness of their position flashed upon them.

But Luella would not call back any of the four to remain, and saw them disappear from sight, far across the valley, with a sigh of commingled hope and fear.

Jerry had decided to go at once to the fort as the most likely place to find the scout. He had never been there, but had several times been in sight of it, when hunting with his master, so knew well where it was, and the best way to get there.

He struck off on a bee line, after leaving the Choctaw Valley, and then set the pace so as to reach the army post early in the night.

They camped but once for rest and supper, and were riding along at a brisk pace, Jerry having reported that the fort was but a few miles away, when, all of a sudden, they came to a halt.

The keen eyes of Jerry had suddenly fallen upon a horseman ahead.

And more, he saw that the horseman had come to a halt, barred their way, and the bright moonlight glimmered upon a weapon held ready in his hand.

There might be other horsemen near, and the boldness of the man appeared conclusive proof that there were, for he had seen them first, and would one man dare meet four?

"Look dar, boys! Dat man means fight, or he'd hev run away when he seen us fust," cried Jerry, pointing to the solitary horseman in their path, and upon whom the eyes of the four negroes were now riveted.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN ALARM.

The quartette of negroes sat upon their horses undecided just what to do. Brave as they were, it was not in their minds to fly the field, vanish, as they were upon a special mission. And yet they did not know just whom they had to contend with, nor what might happen to frustrate their work.

Fortunately Buffalo Bill had been taking them in, and recognizing them, as he did, he called out:

"Ho, black pards! How are you?"

An exclamation of delight broke from each one of the negroes, and they spurred forward to meet the scout, who was riding toward them, having returned his revolver to its holster.

The bright moonlight revealed the scout distinctly, and Jerry called out: "Lordy, Mars' Buf'ler Bill, but we is glad, sartin, for we war jist going ter find you, sah, at de fort."

"I am glad to meet you then, boys; but has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes, sah, mighty wrong, fer we hasn't found Mars' Bert at all."

"You did not find him at home when you returned there?"

"No, sah."

"Did you go back over the trail for another search?"

"Yes, sah, and we went again, and Miss Luella went, too, but we didn't find no trace of him, sah, and so missy she tole us jist ter come and find you, and

she knew you would diskiver what had happened to poor Mars' Bert."

"It is strange that he did not return home. You could find no trace of him? Did you discover any signs of Indians in the valley?"

"No, sah."

"Nor other trails?"

"Only de one Mars' Bert left us ter find out what it was."

"Did you follow that any?"

"No, sah; we clean forgot dat odder trail."

"Then that is the one to follow to find your master. Did you say there were only two horses?"

"Yes, sah."

"And shod, were they?"

"Yes, sah."

"That means that white men rode them, and his disappearance had something to do with the same band that dogged my trail and fired on me."

"Jist so, sah, I reckons."

"I will help you, Jerry, to find your master."

"Dat's what Missy Luella said she know'd you would do, sah, and dat you was de man ter find Mars' Bert ef anybody cud."

Buffalo Bill remained silent for a moment, and then said:

"Well, we will start for the valley, so you can take the trail back by which you came, Jerry, as you doubtless took the shortest cut."

"Yes, sah, and we didn't lose no time, nuther."

The negroes were very happy in finding the scout, and having him for their leader, all of them having supreme confidence in his ability to find their lost or absent master.

They had ridden a short distance, the scout and his advance, when, suddenly, two shots were heard off on the right, a quarter of a mile away, fired in quick succession, followed by shouts in half a dozen different voices.

"It is over on the stage trail to the fort—one of the Pony Riders doubtless is being held up! Follow me, boys!" cried Buffalo Bill.

Off he went dashing at full speed, the four of the Black Brigade following close behind him.

As they neared the scene several shouts had been heard, evidently given in warning, for the hoof falls and the charging horses could be distinctly heard.

"Forward! Charge!" shouted Buffalo Bill, in commanding tones, anxious to let whoever was attacked know that help was near.

But those who were doing the mischief needed not the deep tones of the scout to put them to flight, for there were warning cries, and shouts of: "Cavalry! the cavalry are upon us! Fly for your lives!"

Then followed mounting in hot haste, a dash up the trail, and the half dozen horsemen were in full flight when Buffalo Bill and his four sable pards went sweeping down a slope into the little valley where, it was thought, some tragedy had been enacted.

In the valley was some scattering timber, large trees casting just shadow enough to make the trail winding through them indistinctly seen.

It was the regular trail to the fort from Tarry camp, and along it traveled the coaches, Pony Riders and others going to and from the army post.

Buffalo Bill had turned out of this trail, after meeting Jerry and his comrades, but had only ridden a short distance before the shots had sent him flying to the rescue of whoever was in distress.

As he came upon the scene he saw a horse without a rider, standing in the timber.

The rider was also visible, lying prone upon the ground.

Fortunately for Buffalo Bill he drew rein as he rode up, and thus saved himself from dashing at full speed against a barrier of ropes stretched across the

trail, and in a circle around where the horsemen lay, but not visible in the shadows of the timber.

"Halt, quick!" shouted the scout, as the negroes came on swiftly after him.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

The four blacks halted just in time, for they were almost upon the ropes, which they then observed were drawn taut across the trail, five feet and seven feet from the ground, and upon either side for a hundred feet, thus fencing in a pen, as it were, in which the horseman had been entrapped.

Buffalo Bill's eyes also saw two other forms lying upon the ground, outside of the rope barrier, and in the shadow.

Just where the horseman within the barrier lay there was a gleam of moonlight falling full upon him, and the scout recognized the upturned face.

"It is the stranger from Perdition City, whom they call the Man Killer!" he exclaimed. "They have killed him, I believe."

"But hark! those fellows are not far off, and are sticking to the trail. We must try and catch them, boys!"

Leaping into his saddle the scout went off like the wind, the Black Brigade close behind.

Buffalo Bill knew that the trail leading out of the valley was very steep and rugged, and inferred, therefore, that those he pursued would be forced to come down to a walk; if so, he could get within easy range.

He did not like to leave Gabriel Grandin lying exposed on the trail, nor the bodies of the others, doubtless of his foes, but he decided of them dead, and would return after he had come up with the negroes, if he was able to do so.

So on he pushed, at the full speed of his horse, his four sable pards keeping well up and willing to follow such a leader anywhere.

The scout had gained on those he pursued, and felt sure he could send some bullets from his rifle rattling among them ere they ascended the winding and rugged trail.

As they drew near the steep ascent, the timber grew more dense, shutting out the moonlight wholly.

But the trail was a hard one, the iron-shod hoofs rang upon it in the night air, and the fugitives, halting to see if they were pursued, discovered that their enemies were close upon them.

At once arose a cry of warning, followed by the command: "Scatter all of you into the timber! It is now every man for himself. All meet at the rendezvous!"

The fugitives needed no second bidding, but each one wheeled off to himself in the timber, some to the right, some to the left.

Several moments after Buffalo Bill and his colored guard dashed up, and the steep hill was right before them.

"Halt!"

They all did so, and their ears were turned to catch the slightest sound of hoofs.

Not a sound came to their hearing!

Ahead of them was the ridge, and as it was devoid of timber, the moonlight fell brightly upon the trail for the distance of a quarter of a mile, as it wound around the mountain side.

Not one object was visible moving up it.

"Boys, see if you can hear any sound," said the scout.

All listened attentively, but no sound came to their ears.

"They were farther ahead than I supposed. They scattered back in the timber, and so gave us the slip," explained Buffalo Bill.

Knowing well that further pursuit was useless, the scout decided to return to the spot where the attack had been made upon Gabriel Grandin.

"I have an idea that it was men from

Perdition City, who wished to avenge their comrades, and so dogged him on the trail and headed him off.

"He was evidently on his way to the fort for some purpose, and if they have killed him, he certainly got away with two of his foes. His were the two shots we heard."

"That they spread a rope net to catch him in looks as though they were determined to take him alive, but had to kill him, after all."

"We'll go slow on our way back, men, for I do not wish to push the horses too hard."

So saying, the scout took the back trail to the scene of the tragedy.

He wished to find out if Grandin was really dead, for he had not taken time to discover, in his haste to pursue the horsemen.

Then, too, the bodies of the two men seen upon the ground would show who they were who had sought the capture of the Man Killer.

Riding slowly along, Buffalo Bill reached the scene about half an hour after leaving it, and his very first discovery was that the horse of Gabriel Grandin was gone!

And more: the form of the Man Killer was not there, either!

Horse and rider had disappeared, and to the increased amazement of the scout and the negroes, so had the bodies of his two assailants!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

Buffalo Bill was in a quandary, there was no mistaking that fact.

He stood in the timber, gazing upon the ground, where he had last seen the form of the unknown—Gabriel Grandin.

Then, too, where the two other prostrate forms had been, there was nothing now!

"It's mighty strange, sah," averred Jerry.

"Maybe dey wasn't dead," suggested Jute.

"Jist a-playin' possum," added Jarvis.

"Maybe ghosts did it," Jack remarked in a whisper, and this last suggestion was not relished by his black companions, though Buffalo Bill laughed.

Two of the ropes, it was seen, had been removed, for the scout remembered that they were double across the trail, and now the lower strand was gone!

Just what it meant he could only surmise.

"Boys, I guess the whole band did not run off, but some lay low, and while we went in pursuit of the others, who gave us the slip, they just came here and toted off those bodies," was Cody's opinion.

"I reckons you is right, Mars' Bill."

"Now, we cannot follow trails by night, bright as the moonlight is, but, as the night is young yet, we must push on."

"Yas, sah; dat's so, seein' as how Mars' Bert is waitin' somewhars fer us."

"We will go by way of Tarry camp, though it will be some twenty miles out of our way; but I can report our discovery, and perhaps Trump Gale can tell me something I may wish to know about the Man Killer and those who must have followed him to the station."

"They play late at Gale's saloon, so we'll find them up, and I may learn what will be of much service to us."

"Now, boys, just gather in these ropes, and we'll start."

The four negroes quickly obeyed, and mounting, the horses were put at a canter on the trail to Camp Tarry.

It was a ride of thirty miles, from where they were, but Buffalo Bill felt that they could reach there within four hours. Once there, he would go into camp on a creek several miles' ride away in the direction of Shadow Valley, and give the horses a good rest.

He did not wish the negroes to be seen with him at Camp Tarry, so he decided to send them to the camping place he had in view, branching off when near Trump Gale's station, and let them take

his horse with them, while he would get another animal from the storekeeper, with a good lot of supplies, as he was of the opinion that the trail he was to follow would be no short one.

Keeping the horses well down to their speed, they came near to the station about one o'clock, and Buffalo Bill, halting, said:

"Jerry, you branch off here, along this ridge. Take my horse with you, for it's not over a quarter of a mile I have to walk. Two miles from here, in a valley, you'll find a grove of timber, which is a fine camp, with wood, water and grass plentiful."

"Turn in there and await my coming, but get the rest you need, and look well to the horses. I will be along within a couple of hours."

Jerry said that he fully understood, and dismounting, the scout threw him his bridle rein, saw them all ride away along the ridge and started then on foot up the trail to Camp Tarry.

Walking briskly, the lights of the camp soon came into view.

However deserted and lonesome a place Camp Tarry was by day, when its people were all off at work, by night it was a very brisk community.

The miners were wont to keep the bar and gambling tables going until an hour after midnight, and then seek their cabins in the mountains for rest.

So all was in full blast when Buffalo Bill walked up to the large cabin which at night was bar and gambling den, and over which Trump Gale presided.

Glancing in at the open door Buffalo Bill took in the busy scene, just beginning to wane, for the gamblers and hard drinkers were about tired out.

There were half a hundred tough-looking, roughly dressed men present, and one who was attired differently from the others stood out in bold relief in their midst.

That one, clad in a velvet jacket, black slouch hat, corduroy pants and high-top cavalry boots, and with a face handsome and striking, riveted the eyes of Buffalo Bill, and caused his face to turn white, as there broke from his lips the words:

"My God! It is Boyd Bernard! The Dead is Alive!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEFT ON THE FIELD.

When Gabriel Grandin rode away from camp Tarry, on his way to the fort, in his search of Buffalo Bill, he did not surmise that Trump Gale had suspected harm to the scout, nor that Gale had sent Utah, the half-breed, to get there ahead of him with a warning note to tell the scout that the strange unknown was on his trail.

Whatever his purpose, the Man Killer rode on his way calmly, and kept well to the trail, which he readily followed.

He rode rapidly, too, and with the appearance of one well up in border ways.

At last night came on, but where the timber was heavy, the moonlight did not pierce the shadows to reveal the trail, so he allowed his horse to be the guide, feeling sure that the sagacious animal would stick to it unerringly.

At last he descended a very rugged path, down which he walked, leading his horse.

On reaching the valley he remounted and pressed on rapidly, aiming to reach the fort before it grew very late.

Suddenly his horse was halted, and with such force that he was thrown back upon his haunches, almost unseating his rider.

Instantly Grandin suspected a trap, and whipping out his revolver, as he discovered that the way was barred by a rope stretched across the trail, he wheeled to the right.

But again he was checked by a rope barrier, and a stern voice shouted:

"Surrender, or you shall die! You are hemmed in completely, Gabriel Grandin."

But, the Man Killer was not to tamely

submit, and once, twice, he fired his revolver in quick succession, for now he detected moving forms in the shadows.

Without waiting to see the result of his shots, he wheeled his horse, as upon a pivot, drove the spurs deep, and dashed away to the left, unconscious that in that direction also the way was barred.

His horse went against the double rope with a force that hurled him upward and backward, and he fell heavily.

Grandin also fell, and with a force that knocked the breath from his body and stunned him into insensibility.

Motionless as the dead he lay, while a voice cried out, loudly:

"We've got him, boys!"

Shouts of triumph filled the woods, and then was heard:

"What if he be dead?"

Before reply could be made a warning cry came from a man back with the horses, and the announcement:

"There is cavalry coming at a run, pards!"

The band, in great alarm, unheeding the call of their leader to take with them the form of the Man Killer, broke for their horses, mounted in great haste, and away they sped, urged to greater speed by the voice of the scout, as he gave a command as though to troopers, to charge.

With the flight of the assailants of Gabriel Grandin, the field was left as Buffalo Bill and his black cohort found it.

Had the scout not ridden away so quickly in pursuit of the fugitive horsemen, he would have observed that the seemingly dead man was rapidly regaining consciousness.

His broad breast rose and fell convulsively, as the lungs inhaled the air, and in his ears he heard the confused sound of voices.

Soon he moved, then half rose, but only to fall back again.

For a moment he lay still; then with an effort, sat up, pressing his hand to his forehead.

So looking about him, he saw his horse standing near.

Then his eyes fell upon the bodies of two men lying not far away.

Passing his hand over his head, then about his body, arms, and legs, he muttered:

"I am not hurt, only slightly bruised. I had a heavy fall, as also did my horse, when dashing against those ropes; yet he does not look hurt."

With some effort he arose to his feet and walked toward his horse.

Leading him along a few paces, he said:

"He is not hurt either; only frightened."

After a moment of thought he continued:

"Did those men run off in the moment of triumph, or were they driven off?"

"It seems that I heard horsemen dash up, and some one bent over me."

"Well, I am free to go on my way, and I should lose no time about it."

"But, who were my foes. There were half a score of them at least, and they planned well—oh! that is a horse yonder—doubtless belonging to these men."

"Why not take their bodies to the fort with me?"

"I will, for they may be recognized, and that will tell me who the rest of my foes are."

With this he walked over to the thicket, where he had heard the neigh of a horse, and there he found two animals hitched.

CHAPTER XXV.

HIS RECORD KNOWN.

Unhitching the two horses found in the thicket, Grandin led them to where the two bodies lay.

Bending over them, he looked first into one face, then the other, and muttered:

"Dead! I knew my aim was true."

"It is too dark for me to recognize them here, even if I do know them; but they go with me."

With this he walked to the two lariats stretched across the trail, and began to take them down.

"It will not do to have these up across the trail, to have a coach drive into, or to throw a pony rider or courier, and the lariats will come well into use in tying those bodies on the horses," he said.

First one body was placed across the saddle, and securely bound there, and then the other.

Then mounting his own horse, with the reins of the led animals over his saddle horn, he rode off on his way to the fort, not five minutes before the return of Buffalo Bill and his black comrades.

Had the scout and the negroes been coming at a gallop he would have heard the fall of their horses' hoofs.

As it was, he did not know that the man whom he was then going to seek was within half a mile of him.

On he rode, with the horses at a trot with their ghastly loads.

At last, as he came to the top of a range, the lights of the fort glimmered before him, and riding up to the stockade wall he halted at the challenge of the sentinel.

"Halt! Who comes there?" came from a dark crevice in the wall.

"Friend!"

"Dismount, advance and give the countersign!" ordered the sentinel.

"I do not know the countersign."

"I am a visitor, and have come on a matter of business."

"Corporal of the guard! Post number ten!" called out the sentinel.

The corporal was soon on hand; the visitor told why he was there, and he was piloted into the fort, leading the two horses to which were tied the dead bodies.

Taken before the officer of the day, Gabriel Grandin asked quickly:

"Is Buffalo Bill here?"

"No; he left on a long scout before dark."

An exclamation of disappointment was uttered by the Man Killer, to whom the officer of the day put the question:

"Who are you?"

"My name is Gabriel Grandin."

"What are you?"

"A hunter."

The sergeant then whispered something to the officer, who seemed surprised and looked at the visitor more attentively, while he said:

"There is a man at Perdicion City of your name, and who is also called the Man Killer."

"I am the man, sir," was the calm response.

"What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Buffalo Bill, but he is not here; I will leave."

"Not so fast, please."

"Well, sir?"

"How do you account for the two dead men you have strapped to those horses?"

"I rode into a trap on the way, defended myself and killed those two men, the rest of the band being put to flight, I think, by the arrival of a party of horsemen. Was Buffalo Bill with others, for it might have been—"

"No; he left alone; but, do you not know who came to your rescue?"

"The trap I rode into was a network of lariats. Against them I rode my horse at full speed, and was thrown heavily and stunned."

"It seemed to me, in my unconscious condition, that some one came and went off after my enemies; but finding no one there, when I recovered, I tied these bodies to their saddles and brought them on to the fort."

"I am sorry Buffalo Bill is not here, very sorry."

"What do you wish with Buffalo Bill?"

"Pardon me, captain, but that is my affair."

"Sergeant, is the colonel still up?"

"Yes, sir; he was when I made the rounds twenty minutes ago."

"You will come with me, sir," said the officer of the day, and he led the way

toward headquarters, telling the sergeant to remove the bodies from the horses and search them thoroughly.

There were lights still in the headquarters office, and the captain preceded the prisoner there, and was told by the sentinel that the colonel was up, and alone.

Being announced, he went in with Gabriel Grandin, and as the commandant turned at their entrance, he said:

"Pardon my late call, Colonel Gardner, but I have with me a man I deemed it best for you to see, sir, for he is known in Perdicion City as Gabriel Grandin, the Man Killer."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN UNFORGOTTEN FACE.

At the introduction of Gabriel Grandin, by the officer of the day, Colonel Gardner turned and looked at the stranger, who, though riding voluntarily into the fort, was nothing more than a prisoner the moment he was known as the Man Killer.

One glance into the face of the unknown, and the colonel started.

He eyed him from head to foot, then seemed to be trying to recall some memory of long before, and said slowly:

"Who are you?"

"Gabriel Grandin, sir, is my name."

The colonel repeated the name over several times slowly, and asked:

"Is that your real name?"

"I am not one to sail under false colors, Colonel Gardner."

"I do not recall your name, though I am sure that we have met before."

"A resemblance, perhaps, sir, to some one you have met."

"It may be; I seldom forget a face, and yours comes back to me as one I have met. Do you not remember having met me?"

"I never before met Colonel Gardner, sir," was the reply, and yet it seemed to hold some hidden significance in it that was not readable.

"What is your occupation, sir?"

"I am a hunter, sir."

"Where is your home?"

"I dwell at Perdicion City, sir."

"Why did you come here?"

"To see Buffalo Bill, the scout, sir."

"For what reason?"

"Pardon me, sir, but that I shall explain to him when I meet him."

"Is your errand a hostile one toward my chief of scouts?"

"I am not one to go around advertising that I intend to kill a man, Colonel Gardner."

"You have, sir, from all accounts, a very unenviable name in Perdicion City."

"In what respect, sir?"

"You are called a Man Killer."

"Yes, if to defend one's life, to draw and fire before the other man does, thus managing to live while he dies, is to give a person an unenviable name, I have one," and the words were spoken bitterly.

"Why do men seek to kill you, unless you have enraged them?"

"I am not here, sir, to make you my father confessor; but, may not I have been the one wronged, and seen by those who have done the wrong, does it not appear natural that I am wanted out of the way, that a dead man can tell no tales?"

"Who can say aught against me on this frontier, save that I have defended my life; for I am not a drunkard; I am not a gambler, and have willingly done no man a wrong, other than to kill to save my own life."

The man spoke in a low, earnest tone, and both Colonel Gardner and the officer of the day were impressed by his words.

They recalled, too, that in the stories told of him, he had not been the one to provoke the trouble.

That he might have some business with Buffalo Bill was natural, and also that the scout might know more about him than any one else seemed reasonable.

"Well, Mr. Grandin, I have no charge to make against you, for none has been brought to me directly; but it is strange

that you did not meet Buffalo Bill, if you came the direct trail from Perdition City, for I happen to know that he went that way."

"I came the direct trail, sir, and did not meet him, though he may have been the one who helped me in a moment of need, for I added to my record to-night, Colonel Gardner, taking the lives of two men out of half a score, who entrapped me."

"How was that, sir?"

Gabriel Grandin told of the trap into which he had fallen, his two fatal shots, stunning fall, and the belief that some one came to his rescue, and how he had then come on to the fort, bringing the two dead men on their own horses.

"And they are here now?" asked the colonel, who had listened attentively to his story.

"They are, sir, for I supposed they would be known to some one at the fort. I wished to identify them."

The officer of the day explained what he had ordered done with the bodies, and then Colonel Gardner said:

"Mr. Grandin, I shall not confine you as a prisoner; but you must remain at the fort until the return of Buffalo Bill.

"You shall be given good quarters, but not be allowed to leave the fort. In the morning I will talk with you again.

"Captain Hayden, you know my wishes in regard to this gentleman," and Colonel Gardner's bow was a dismissal of the visitor until he was further wanted.

The captain observed his look of surprise, but led him over to the officers' quarters, where he was given a room. The guards were all posted regarding him, and told that he was a prisoner only so far as not being allowed to leave the fort.

His horse was put away, his weapons and saddle taken possession of, and he was left alone in his lodgings.

When the morning came a young lieutenant, calling at the request of Captain Hayden, to invite Gabriel Grandin to breakfast, found the cabin empty!

A search was made at once for the missing man, but he was not to be found anywhere in the fort!

In some mysterious way he had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MAN KILLER'S ESCAPE.

A thorough search of the fort revealed that the Man Killer was certainly gone; he was nowhere within the stockade walls, that was certain.

The room which had been given him was where an officer then absent on leave had his quarters. It was a small cabin, one of a row of a dozen.

Gabriel Grandin's weapons had been hung up in the officers' assembly hall, and his saddle and bridle on a peg outside on the piazza; but, they also were missing!

The flight of the man was reported to Colonel Gardner. He at once commanded that the escape should be most fully investigated, the sentinels on duty during the night should be called up and questioned and every effort made to discover how Gabriel Grandin had left the fort, and who had aided him, for he could not have gotten out without aid.

The investigation resulted in a sentinel on an obscure post, back of headquarters, reporting that an officer had ridden up, soon after he went on duty, had been challenged, had given the countersign, and so had passed out of the stockade gate.

Just where this sentinel's post was the timber was heavy and thick, and this caused it to be dark, the moonlight not penetrating to the ground there.

The sentinel was not to blame, for the officer had given the countersign, was in uniform, for he had cap and cloak on, and had spoken pleasantly to him, telling him to say to those who followed that he would await them at the river ford.

Supposing that the officer, with others, was going off on a hunt, the sentinel had

thought nothing of it, but no one had followed, and he supposed that they had left the fort by another entrance.

The corral was visited to there discover that the horse of Gabriel Grandin was gone, and search even disclosed that his own saddle, bridle and weapons were missing.

He had certainly gone out as he had come into the fort, save that the two horses and their dead riders had been left behind.

Who had aided the man in the fort? was the question, for was it possible for him to have escaped unaided?

How had he secured the countersign, his weapons, his outfit, and his horse from the corral?

There was no guard over the officers' assembly house, so he might readily have gone there and obtained his things.

But, how about the uniform cloak and cap he had worn out?

The sentinel said that he had not recognized the officer; but he was a new man at the post, lately joining his regiment.

The countersign had certainly been given; how had Gabriel Grandin secured this?

The guard over the corral had gone on at midnight, and he knew nothing of the arrival at the fort of the Man Killer.

By a strange coincidence he, too, was one of the new men, and reported that a soldier had passed into the corral carrying a saddle and bridle, and saying that he had been sent for an officer's horse. This soldier had also given the countersign.

Told to describe the soldier, he stated that he wore an infantry cap and uniform, and the description of his face and form was conclusive proof that it must have been Gabriel Grandin himself, wearing an officer's uniform coat without shoulder straps, which was mistaken in the night for a private's suit.

The description given of the horseman at the gate out of which he had passed tallied with the soldier described by the guard at the corral.

But, could Gabriel Grandin accomplish all this without aid? was the question.

It seemed utterly impossible for him to do so.

He had said he was a stranger at the fort, and yet he had shown a perfect knowledge of its interior.

The bed in his cabin had not been occupied, and though several young officers had remained late at the assembly hall they had seen no one come there.

The time that both sentinels had reported seeing the man go after the horse and the supposed officer ride out of the stockade gate, tallied perfectly, and was an hour after midnight.

Having heard all reports, and in vain tried to fasten suspicion upon some one who could have aided the prisoner to escape, Colonel Gardner ordered five of the best scouts to take up his trail at the gate and follow it to the end, bringing the man back with them, but only in case of resistance to fire upon him.

The scouts readily took up the trail and started off rapidly upon it, for they knew that the man had all of six hours' start of them, and as he saw them disappear in the distance, Colonel Gardner muttered:

"I hope they can bring him back, for his face has haunted me all night; and I must know when and where I have met him before, for we have met, and under strange circumstances. Of that I feel assured."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AS THOUGH FROM THE GRAVE.

When Buffalo Bill looked into the door of Trump Gale's saloon he was startled, as may well be supposed, at seeing there no other person than the man whom he had not only seen fall dead, as he believed, at his shot in Shadow Valley, but whose body he had wrapped securely in a blanket and buried.

The scout was not superstitious; he did

not believe in ghosts; he had seen too many shuffle off this mortal coil to believe that one, once dead, could ever return, either bodily or spiritually, and appear in the flesh again.

But there stood a contradiction to his belief that the dead could not return to life!

Could it be that, after all, Boyd Bernard had only been wounded, stunned, as he (Buffalo Bill) had been, and been dug from the grave by comrades?

That was the only solution the scout could arrive at of his appearance there.

That it was Boyd Bernard there seemed not a shadow of a doubt. Buffalo Bill felt that he could not be mistaken in the man.

There he stood, tall, well-formed, dressed as Boyd Bernard was dressed, and with that face not easily matched calmly turned upon his companions in a game of cards being played.

Buffalo Bill regarded him with deepest attention, and scanned his face, form, movements, to decide that all were Boyd Bernard's.

He heard the even tones of his voice, the exact tones of the man he had killed.

No, there could be no mistake; Boyd Bernard, or his ghost, was before him!

Buffalo Bill would not enter the saloon, but stood back in the shadow.

He did not yet wish to face the man he had believed dead and buried; so he decided to find Trump Gale and ask him for an explanation of what he saw, for Trump knew Boyd Bernard well.

He had heard Red Knife Joe and his two companions accuse him, Buffalo Bill, of killing Boyd Bernard; yes, he had even heard him acknowledge that he had killed the man, buried him, and had donned his victim's clothes!

He would see what Trump Gale had to say; so he walked around to another door and watching his chance called to Trump.

The storekeeper heard the call and came out of the saloon.

"Why, Cody, is it you?"

"Yes, I just returned."

"Get to the fort all right with your trio of cutthroats?"

"Yes, and I received your note of warning by the half breed, and wish to thank you."

"That's all right. Utah came back and told me he met you, and I was glad, for somehow I felt that that Man Killer meant mischief."

"Perhaps, though I think not."

"You didn't meet him?"

"Well, I saw him."

"Any trouble?"

"Well, not between us, though he had had trouble."

"Say, Trump, what men have gone away from here to-night on horseback, taking the trail to the fort—say, half a dozen or more of them?"

"I do not know of any, really, that have gone off in a party."

"Any returned in a party in the last hour or so?"

"No, I think not."

"Then they dodged this place," and Buffalo Bill told Trump Gale of his coming upon the scene in the valley, and putting the men to flight who had entrapped the Man Killer.

But he did not make mention of his having met the four negroes, and that they were with him in the rescue, and then were awaiting his coming.

Gale listened with interest, and when he heard that the Man Killer and his two dead assailants had disappeared, upon the scout's return, he said:

"See here, Cody, it seems to be the fashion of dead men to skip out, now."

"Why?"

"I thought that you killed Boyd Bernard two days ago over in Shadow Valley?"

"I thought so, too."

"Well, you didn't, or if you did, his ghost is here to-night."

"Gale, that is why I called you. I was about to enter the saloon, when I saw that man, Boyd Bernard, and though I

am not of the scary kind, the sight of him gave me a start. Who is he?"

"Boyd Bernard."

"You are sure?"

"Well, he came in and gave me a scare too; but I called him Boyd Bernard, he replied to me, and sitting down began to play cards, and has won right along."

"I was waiting for a chance to talk to him, after what you told me, and Red Knife Joe said what he saw you do."

"Trump, call him out here, for I wish to know what it means; and more—why he sought my life."

"I'll do it," and entering the saloon, Trump Gale came out a moment after and said excitedly:

"Buffalo Bill, *Boyd Bernard has gone!*"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GHOST ON HORSEBACK.

Trump Gale was as much startled as was Buffalo Bill at the appearance of Boyd Bernard in the saloon.

He told how he had come quietly into the saloon, replied in his usual courteous manner to the salutations of himself and others who had known him, and then began to play, seating himself at a table where three men were already engaged in a game of cards, and asking to be allowed to join them.

They had seemed glad to have him do so, had named the limit, and from the first he had been a winner.

All along Trump Gale had further said that he had regarded him particularly, after what he had heard of his death and burial in Shadow Valley, and was only waiting for the game to end to have a talk with him.

Then Buffalo Bill had called him out of the saloon, and upon his return he found that Boyd Bernard had vanished!

He had questioned the men with whom he had been playing, and they had told him that Bernard had ended the game abruptly, said he must be off, and had then left them.

He had gone out of the end door opposite to the one outside of which Buffalo Bill was waiting.

"He cannot have proceeded far, for at the most he has been gone but ten minutes," suggested Buffalo Bill.

"We will see," and Trump Gale led the way to the cabin where he put his guests, when he had any to remain all night.

No guest was there. Sing Lo, the Chinese cook, was found, playing a game of solitaire, and betting for and against himself.

He only recalled having seen Boyd Bernard come by on horseback and take the trail to the right along the ridge.

Calling out to him, and asking if he was not going to remain all night, Bernard had answered that he had to follow an important trail; then had disappeared.

Buffalo Bill noted the trail taken by the horseman, and remembered with some dismay that it led right to the camp of his sable pards.

"They know Boyd Bernard, and if they see him they will stampede, sure," muttered the scout; and he added:

"I must get off just as soon as I can."

To Trump he then said that he wanted some provisions. So the store was opened, and the things were given him, along with a pack-horse.

Telling Gale to be sure and make no mention of Boyd Bernard's having been shot by him in Shadow Valley, as Red Knife Joe and his pards must be all the others who knew of it, Buffalo Bill mounted his horse behind the pack saddle and started off on the trail which the "Ghost on Horseback" had taken, as the scout called the one he was following.

"I am only afraid the Ghost on Horseback will stampede my blacks, never to be found again," muttered the scout, and he quickened his gait, to be at the camp as soon as possible.

He was not long in coming to the spot where he descended into the valley, and

just where he had told Jerry and his comrades to camp he saw the glimmer of a fire.

"The camp-fire's there at least," he muttered.

Reaching the valley, he turned toward the camp in the timber, and was drawing near when a tremulous voice called out.

"Is dat you, Mars' Buf'ler Bill?"

"Yes, Jerry. Are you all right?" replied the scout, as he rode along in the full glare of the moonlight, while the voice had called out from the shadows of the timber.

"No sah! we hain't all right!"

"Why, what is wrong?" And the scout surmised what the answer would be.

"We seen a ghost, sah."

"A ghost, Jerry?"

"Yes, sah, a ghost on horseback."

"When?"

"Only half a hour ago, sah."

"Where?"

"He passed right along dar, sah, right by dese woods, sah."

"We all seen him, sah, and thought he was you; but then the moon shone right in his face, an', Mars' Buf'ler Bill, 'fore de Goo' Lord, sah, it were Mars' Boyd Bernard, de gemman dat you shooted, an' put in de grave, sah, and I hain't tellin' you no lie!"

"Did he halt here?"

"No, sah, he jist rode right by, lookin' in at de camp-fire, but not stopping."

"Didn't he see you?"

"No, sah, fer we lay mighty low, I kin tell yer. At least, sah, he didn't say nothin'."

"Did you speak to him?"

"Speak to him, sah? Oh, no! We wanted him jist ter go along, and Jute, poor nigger, mighty nigh had a fit, he were so scared; and so was me, too, and all of us."

"Well, boys, I saw him, too, at Camp Tarry, and to-morrow we'll trail the ghost; but now we must get what rest we can," and the little camp was soon silent in repose.

CHAPTER XXX.

BACK TO SHADOW VALLEY.

Buffalo Bill went to sleep, there was no doubt of that, in spite of the prowling about in the moonlight of what appeared to be the man he had killed and buried, or his ghost.

But the four negroes did not sleep. They lay awake in fear and anxiety lest the ghost, or shade of the dead, should come into camp for their ill.

The shock to nerves and mind which they had experienced in seeing Boyd Bernard's supposed shade on horseback they could not immediately overcome.

They had stood by his grave, yet he had ridden by within fifteen feet of their camp in the bushes, and every one of them would have "stampeded," as the scout had feared, only their knees actually refused to bear the weight of their bodies.

So they lay wide awake watching and apprehending that the apparition might return.

But at last, tired out as they were, they sunk to sleep from sheer exhaustion, and Buffalo Bill had to call twice to arouse them as the sun came streaming over the range.

They sprang to their feet and were ready for work, for all fear was gone with the weird moonlight.

"We'll have breakfast here, boys, and then push on, for the horses will be well rested," said the scout.

Jute soon had breakfast ready, while the others saddled up. Breakfast hastily eaten, Buffalo Bill mounted and rode on ahead, leaving the negroes to break camp and follow.

Jerry was the first one to overtake the scout, and he found him following the trail of the horse that had passed the camp in the moonlight.

"That is a pretty solid looking trail, Jerry, for the ghost of a horse to leave," suggested the scout, pointing to the well defined tracks.

"Yes, sah, but kin a horse be a ghost?"

"As well as a human being can."

"You see this horse was well shod, too."

"So he war, sah; but, Buf'ler Bill—"

"Well, Jerry?"

"It war Mars' Boyd Bernard sure, dead or alive."

"You really think so? Well, we'll see what story the grave tells."

"You going dere, sah?"

"Yes, this trail leads toward the valley, and it is near it that we wish to begin the search for your master."

"Dat's so, sah; but it 'pears ter me dat de ghost is going right back to his grave, sah."

"He has gone in that direction, that is evident."

"S'pose he hain't in his grave?"

"Then I won't believe in ghosts, Jerry."

"If he's dere, you will, sah?"

"I'll consider it, Jerry."

"If de body is gone, sah?"

"That will prove to me, Jerry, that the man was not dead, though I saw where my bullet struck him in the head."

"So war you, sah."

"Yes, and the bullet may have glanced as mine did, and, playing possum, or really stunned and unconscious, he may have been rescued as soon as we left by some comrade, though I do not understand how it could be, Jerry, and he live."

Jerry shook his head dubiously. It was evident he leant toward the ghost story, but, with the scout to depend on, he would face what came his way, for outside of the supernatural, Jerry and his comrades knew not fear.

The other three now came up with the pack-horse in lead, and, as the animal carried all other extra weights, it gave relief to those they rode, and they were able to push on at a good gait.

A halt was made at noon, and then the ride was continued, the trail of the "Ghost on Horseback" being steadily followed, for it did not swerve from the way they were going, direct toward Shadow Valley.

"He did not camp, that is certain," remarked the scout, and Jarvis muttered something about there being no need of it, as "ghosts" didn't need what he was pleased to call "wittals."

The valley was at last reached, the descent made from the range, and the trail led to the river just at the spot where Buffalo Bill had crossed in tracking Red Knife Joe, if he had been the one to fire on him as he stood by Boyd Bernard's grave.

Crossing the river, the scout led the way to the grave, and as the shadows began to deepen and they drew near to the spot it became evident that the four blacks would rather be anywhere else than just there, as was proven by Jerry's remark:

"It hain't gwine ter take long, is it, Mars' Buf'ler Bill?"

And straight to the grave in Shadow Valley led the trail they had been following.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STRANGE INSCRIPTION.

The trail led to the grave, or rather to a spot near it, where the horse had been staked out.

There, too, was the remnant of a camp fire, the ashes not yet cold!

Buffalo Bill dismounted and ordered that the horses should be unsaddled and staked out to rest and feed. They would be some time at the grave.

It would we slow work opening it, and this was his intention.

He proposed to see what the grave would reveal.

"Boys, we must throw out the dirt," the scout announced.

"It's bad luck, Mars' Buf'ler Bill, ter disturb a dead body arter it have been buried," demurred Jerry.

"I'll take all chances of bad luck, Jerry. I propose to know about the Boyd Bernard I saw alive, after having killed him, as I suppose."

"It don't look as if anybody done touch it."

"No, it appears to be as we left it. But don't wait; we must get to work. I'll begin, and you stand ready to relieve me."

"Our tin plates will make good shovels."

The saplings over the grave, and which had been fastened down by crotched sticks driven into the ground, seemed to have been undisturbed, but the scout was surprised to see that the wolves had not been there scratching about the grave to try and drag out the body.

Removing the saplings, the scout began with a tin plate, and threw out the dirt rapidly.

The negroes relieved him, and worked with great gusto, for they were anxious to get away from the spot before the full night came on.

The scout had buried the man well, in the grave he had already found there, and over which had been cut on the tree the strange words:

"My best friend lies in this grave."

The lettering was not of recent cutting, having been carved in the tree a year or more.

Beneath, the scout, it will be remembered, had carved the words:

"BOYD BERNARD,

186—"

He had not finished cutting the year, when the shot from ambush had struck him, and he had sunk down at the base of the tree.

Now, as he looked at the lettering, he started.

Could he believe his own eyesight?

He rubbed his eyes and looked again.

It seemed real what he saw.

He stood up, his gaze fixed upon the tree.

The negroes knocked off work and eagerly watched him.

They were ready for a foot-race, so impressed were they at the earnest manner of their leader.

"Wha' de matter, Mars' Buf'ler Bill?" whispered Jerry, awed by the surroundings even in the broad glare of daylight.

"Look there!"

Their eyes were already staring, but they saw nothing.

They then glanced anxiously toward the horses.

The four blacks were on the very eve of a stampede; a word would start them; but Jerry managed to whisper:

"I don't see nothin', Mars' Buf'ler Bill."

"Look at that new lettering on that tree!"

They did look, but, as they were not scholars, they failed to detect anything strange in what they saw.

Then the scout continued:

"Why, the date of the birth of Boyd Bernard has been cut there—yes, and something else, as well."

As he spoke Buffalo Bill stepped up out of the grave, now opened nearly down to the body, and walked close up to the tree, the four negroes watching him.

A moment he gazed at the carving, and then read it aloud.

What he saw was as follows:

First was the old carving:

"My best friend lies in this grave."

Beneath this was the lettering of the scout, reading:

"BOYD BERNARD,

186—"

But then came the addition, cut equally as skillfully into the soft bark, and making it read:

"BOYD BERNARD,

"Born March 1st, 1841,

"Killed on this spot Sept., 1868.

"God be merciful to a mistaken life.

B. B."

Over and over again did Buffalo Bill read the carving in the tree.

He saw that the date of the man's birth was given, and the date he had left unfinished had been added.

Then followed the line that told of an erring life, and asked Heaven's mercy upon it.

Whoever had cut that inscription must well know the man whose grave it was.

And more, the scout saw these two letters at the end:

"B. B."

This seemed to make the words his own.

Altogether, it was a mystery that set Buffalo Bill to thinking deeply, but it was beyond his fathoming at that crisis.

Would it be a revelation of something yet to come?

CHAPTER XXXII.

REVEALED.

Not a stroke of work had any of the Black Guard done, while Buffalo Bill stood regarding the inscription that so amazed his attention; they were waiting to see just what the scout's amazement meant.

At last he turned to them and read the inscription aloud.

"Boys, the man who came here must have come purposely to visit this grave, for he came straight to it, as his trail showed us."

"Then he must have known about the death of Boyd Bernard to have come here."

"And, more, knowing it, he has revealed that he knew the man, for here he has cut the date of birth and words that show his knowledge of Boyd Bernard's past life."

"Then, too, he stamps me as having put the words here, for, so to speak, he has signed my initials, B. B."

"Massa Buf'ler Bill, dis here hain't no place fer us, sah, and night am coming only too quick," urged Jerry.

"Yes, sah, we wants ter be a gittin'."

"Fore de Lord, we does."

"I is ready now."

These expressions showed the scout that his cohort was painfully uneasy, but he said:

"Well, boys, we'll go as soon as we see what that grave contains."

The way that the negroes renewed work showed their anxiety to get away.

"Here's de body, sah," and Jerry and Jute, who were digging, leaped from the grave as though it were a fiery furnace.

The scout stepped down into the opening and soon saw that they had come to the blanket he had wrapped about the form, wrapped closely around with a lariat.

"Yes, the body is here."

"I did not expect it would be," he declared.

But, when about to begin to refill the grave something caught his eye, at which he put out his hand and caught hold of the knot in the lariat.

"I never tied that knot!" he muttered.

So he scraped more dirt off of the blanketed form, then felt along it carefully, and next, to the dismay of the negroes, began to unwrap the lariat.

Lifting the form out, he laid it upon the ground outside of the grave, the Black Pards stepping quickly back.

Springing out, Buffalo Bill took hold of one end of the blanket and gave it a quick pull.

Out rolled the form within.

It was a log of wood!

The four sable Samsons gave a yell in chorus, while Jerry shouted:

"Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! he done turn ter wood!"

But the scout did not seem surprised at the metamorphosis; the changing of a human form into a log of wood appeared to be something he had looked for.

"Boys, it is as I suspected."

"Boyd Bernard was not killed by my bullet."

"Oh, Lordy, good Lordy!"

"He had a most miraculous escape, for he was buried, yet he is alive."

"How he git out of dat grave, sah, and not be a ghost?"

"Well, my idea is that some one was near, watching me, and as soon as we all left he or they dug him up."

"Yes, sah."

"Now the man we trailed here was Boyd Bernard."

"Not his ghost, Mars' Bill?"

"Nonsense, no, Jerry."

"I saw him in Camp Tarry, and he came here, riding through the night."

"Whoever took him out of the grave put this log in in his place."

"Boyd Bernard got here this morning, and it was he who added that lettering you see there."

"Whar he gone now, sah?"

"I do not know; but as I connect the mysterious disappearance of your master in some way with Boyd Bernard, it will be well for us to follow on his trail from here."

"All right, sah, so long as he hain't no dead man; but he hain't no man ter have no more luck, after he hev been put in de grave and got out."

"I think he is a man of great luck, Jerry, for few men are so fortunate."

"You see, this was an old grave, and the earth had sunken far down. The creek doubtless overflowed it, and there is a body far down in the grave, from the inscription on that, too; but we will not disturb it."

"No, sah, oh, no!" cried the four negroes.

"Well, we'll fill the grave in again, log and all, and leave it as it was before."

"Den dat tree tombstone, Mars' Bill, is gwine ter tell a lie."

"Yes, Jerry, but it is a common thing for tombstones to lie, and I remember an old couplet that a man once cut into the gate of a cemetery, and which read:

"Here lie the Dead—

And here the Living lie."

When Buffalo Bill's Black Pards fully saw the meaning of his words, they at least looked as wise as owls, and begun to fill in the grave, just as it had been before. They worked rapidly, too, for they didn't like that spot of weird happenings, and would only be too glad to leave it and never see it again.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

FACING THE MUSIC.

When the grave was restored to its condition, as before the coming of the party, the Black Pards were delighted to hear Buffalo Bill say that they would continue on their way.

The horses were saddled and all were ready for the start, when the scout remarked:

"Now we will see where this trail leads."

It was the trail they had followed up to that point—the track of Boyd Bernard.

They were not long in discovering that the track wound around up the valley.

Following where the valley narrowed into the canyon, and seeing that it continued on up to the top of the cliff, Buffalo Bill halted.

He would have pursued that trail to its destination could he have spared the time, for he was sure it would lead back to Perdition City.

Once there, and face to face with Boyd Bernard, he would know the truth, and find out why the man had shadowed him to kill him.

Buffalo Bill had not forgotten that, over a year before, he had saved the life of Bernard, when a party of miners would have strung him up as a road-agent.

He had risked his own life to save the man, and had told them that it was a case of mistaken identity—that he would vouch for the man as square and honest.

The irate miners of the little isolated camp had yielded only because they knew Buffalo Bill and the position he held.

They all had not yielded, however, until the scout showed that he would protect the man or die with him.

And now it had been Boyd Bernard who, forgetting that life favor, sought to kill him!

Was it any wonder that the scout wished to know why, and, if Bernard was to be his secret foe, to settle the grudge held against him then and there?

The trail went on toward Perdition City, so the scout gave up following it to help the four negroes in their search for their master.

A young girl had put her trust in him—had sent to ask his aid to find her brother, and he had determined to respond with a will.

Already a day and a night had passed, and nothing had been done toward finding Bert Lennox, other than to come to Shadow Valley.

Circumstances beyond their control had detained them on the way.

The coming upon the Man Killer, supposed to have been killed, the chase of his enemies, the going to Camp Tarry, discovering there Boyd Bernard, and then following his trail, with the unearthing and refilling of the grave, had all taken only too much time.

Now Buffalo Bill felt that it was his duty to devote his energies and skill to the discovery of the mysterious young gold hunter of Shadow Valley.

With the daylight yet left to them, the scout decided to proceed to the spot where the young gold hunter had been left by his horse, and see if any clue could be discovered there.

So they rode at a gallop back to the spot, which was reached before darkness had closed in. The negroes sat on their horses and watched with admiration, as the scout dismounted and went over the ground, reading every sign just as one might read what was written on a page before them.

After a while Buffalo Bill spoke:

"Boys, your master was halted here by men on foot. By how many I do not know, but he certainly was led into a trap by men in ambush.

"His horse was purposely turned loose, for hoof tracks tell tales, and the captors of Mr. Lennox did not wish to be trailed; they guarded well against that, you see.

"Being on foot shows that they had a retreat near, or had horses awaiting them some distance off.

"Now, we must find out where, if they came mounted, and if not, then we must find out their retreat.

"Of one thing I am certain, which is that he was not killed.

"They captured him alive, for had they wished to kill him they would have done so from ambush, just as easily as they caught him.

"As they did not kill him, we know that he must be held a prisoner for some purpose, just what I cannot, of course, know, though I surmise it was to force from him what gold he may have found.

"Our best plan is to go first to your home to ascertain if Mr. Lennox has returned, and if not, then start upon the work of finding him—hark! there comes a horse—yes, a number of them, and at full speed!

"We are well hidden here where we are, and the trail leads within a short distance.

"Be ready, boys, for whatever turns up, and if it's to be a fight, make every ghost you can."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

When the fair girl of the Hidden Home in Shadow Valley had seen the four blacks depart, in their search for Buffalo Bill, she felt much relieved in mind, sure that the great scout would find her brother, whose mysterious disappearance led to the belief of his capture by outlaws, with a purpose to secure the secret of his gold accumulation.

That he had been killed she could not believe, for by taking his life, the outlaws would but thwart their own plans, and no Indian signs having been discovered in the valley of late, she did not believe in his capture by the redskins.

If taken by them she could have but little hope for his life.

So it was that Luella decided to secure the aid of Buffalo Bill, and when Jerry and his comrades had gone after the scout she felt at ease.

"Yes, Quickstep," she said to her quadroon maid, "I feel that I have done the right thing in sending for this scout, though I have never seen him.

"You remember that he saved my brother and the boys once, from the Indians, and I have heard so much of Buffalo Bill, the scout, that I have the utmost faith in him.

"Then, too, as the boys saved him down the valley, when he was shot from ambush, he will be the more willing to serve us."

"I hope they may find him, Missy," said Quickstep.

"I hope, too, that Mars' Bert is all right."

"Ah, yes; I hope so, and believe he is in no danger, unless his captors find it impossible to force from him what they would know."

Time drew its slow length along to the waiting mistress and maid, who were counting the time that the Black Guard had been gone. On the second day of their absence, Luella Lennox grew too anxious to remain quietly at home, and, calling to Quickstep, told her that she would go for a gallop up the valley.

"Better not go, Missy," urged Quickstep.

"I will not go far, but the ride will help me, and I may meet them."

So the horse, a fine sorrel, was saddled, and mounting, Luella rode down to the barrier, where Grip, the huge mastiff, was on guard.

She unlocked the chains, holding the bars in place, but she did not lock them.

"Grip, you must watch well, old fellow."

Grip looked as though he would like to go for a gallop, too, especially as he saw his pard Grab trotting along behind his mistress, intending to sneak off with her.

But Luella saw him, too, and Grab went back with his tail between his legs at the scolding he received.

Out in the valley Luella hesitated, undecided which way to go, up or down the trail.

Fortunately she turned up the valley, and had gone a considerable distance when her horse gave a start, and, looking behind her, to her horror she discovered a score of mounted Indians in chase!

At once the alarmed sorrel bounded forward in rapid flight—a flight for life.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST RESORT.

Away went the fleet steed at full speed, and it seemed that Luella need have no fear of being overtaken.

Had she turned down the valley she would have ridden into an ambush, for the redskins had discovered her as she reached the river bank.

They were as surprised at sight of her as she would have been at riding into their ranks.

The reds did not know of the Hidden Home in the valley. They were off on a hunt for game, so had come there in pursuit of a band of elk.

If they could get a paleface scalp they were that much more contented!

Shrinking back at sight of the girl, they had at once mounted their ponies and followed.

She had not seen them, they knew, and they were anxious to get as near upon her as possible before she discovered them.

Watching their chance, they drew nearer when concealed by timber, until at last they had to come out into the open.

When they did so, the sorrel had discovered them, and thus had warned his fair rider.

Looking backward as she ran, Luella saw that the sorrel was holding his own well, and could do better.

She counted just thirty warriors behind their chief, who was in the lead. She had her rifle slung to the saddle horn, and a revolver was in her belt.

But she fully realized that her peril was great, even though the sorrel was fleetlier than their ponies, and she was armed.

She could not get by them to reach the Hidden Home, try as she might; to continue on was to go, she knew not where.

True, she could follow the trail toward Perdition City, as long as it was daylight; but Perdition City was a long fifty miles away, and night was not very far off.

Luella, therefore, understood fully, as she dashed along, the danger of her situation, that it was almost desperate; but she had wonderful nerve, and decided that she would not be taken alive.

After a run of a mile or more, the brave girl drew rein, and, boldly facing the Indians, unslung her rifle and threw it to her shoulder.

She took deliberate aim, unmoved by the rapid approach of the Indians, and pulled trigger.

At the shot the chief's horse plunged forward and fell, throwing his rider.

The chief was quickly upon his feet, but he saw the young girl in rapid flight once more.

Though she had missed the warrior, Luella felt glad that she had shown what her rifle could do.

She saw that they had a wholesome respect for it, too, for they stretched out in a long line and thus continued the pursuit.

The chase went on, until, suddenly, the sorrel's hoof rolled on a stone, and she nearly went down.

His rider recovered him quickly, but, to her dismay, she saw that he had sprained a tendon, and was running lame.

She hoped that this lameness would pass off as he went along, but it did not; rather it seemed to increase, and Luella became white with dread.

It was not the thought of capture now, but of death, for she had determined not to be taken alive! She would die by her own hand!

She felt faint and reeled, as though about to fall from her saddle, the thought of what was to come was so terrible. She half drew out her revolver, as if to use it while she could.

Her horse begun to show more and more lameness, though he was struggling on nobly.

At last it seemed that all hope was gone, and she must act, for the leading Indians were coming closer rapidly.

The chief, on another horse, was again in the lead.

"I must act, and God help me!" she murmured, as she fully drew her revolver from her belt, and then suddenly cried:

"But, not yet! I must strike back before I die!" and again she unslung her rifle.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A WOMAN'S PITY.

The Indians were surprised to see the young girl turn at bay.

They could not understand that she

intended to take her own life, rather than fall alive into their hands; nor did they know that she intended to hit back before she did sacrifice herself.

But, ere she could bring her rifle to a level, and while her panting horse was enjoying the respite of a short rest, there flashed out of a clump of pines shot after shot!

Five were discharged almost as one weapon; then came the rattle of a repeating rifle until a dozen shots had rung out their deadly music.

"Follow me!"

It was the deep voice of Buffalo Bill, and out of the pines he dashed, a revolver in either hand!

Close behind him came the Black Platoon, with drawn revolvers and yelling like demons.

The fire from the pines, though at long range, had been deadly, for several redskins had toppled from their saddles and as many ponies had gone down.

The chief, however, had not been harmed; but the unexpected fire, and the dash to the rescue had brought him and his braves quickly to a halt.

Just as they halted there came another shot, and the chief's horse went down so suddenly that his rider was pinned beneath his weight.

It was Luella Lennox who had fired this shot. Again she had missed the chief, and killed his horse.

"Well done, miss!" shouted Buffalo Bill, as he swept by her in a rush, and putting up his revolvers, he seized his lariat.

But the braves had rallied to the chief's aid, and the scout had to redraw his revolver and begin to fire.

At the same moment the four blacks came flying along, and their weapons began to crack.

Rifles rang out, revolvers rattled, arrows flew, braves fell, horses went down, and in a few moments the reds turned in flight.

The pace was too hot for them, especially as they saw their chief, who had released himself from beneath his horse, and started in flight, suddenly dragged down by the lariat of the scout!

"Pa-e-has-ka! Pa-e-has-ka!"* shouted the Indians, as they fled, and the name seemed to spread terror among them, as they knew that the great scout was their foe. The four black horsemen were supposed to be cavalymen, with others near.

Roped in by the scout, the chief had been quickly secured; then Buffalo Bill and his sable comrades had dashed on to still drive the redskins.

As they did so Luella Lennox rode up to the bound chief, as he lay upon the ground, and gazed at him with considerable interest and pity, for she knew it was his nature to fight—that to him all foes were alike, be they women, children or men; she thought how his proud heart must ache at being bound and a prisoner at her feet.

He was a young man, she could see, even through the paint that covered his face.

He had been her foe, but now he was fallen, and regret came into her heart for him.

With Luella to feel thus was to act humanely—womanly; so she said:

"I will let you return to your people, for if you remain here you will die."

The chief started; he fixed his eyes upon her with a strange look, and as though he understood her perfectly.

Quickly the young woman unbound the well-tied knots of the lariat, and in a few moments the chief was free!

He had been bruised by his fall, but not seriously hurt, and as he rose to his feet, Luella pointed to a pony grazing near, the animal of a brave who had been killed.

"Go!" she commanded.

The chief bowed low, as a courtier might have done, and said in English:

*The Indian name given Buffalo Bill, and meaning Long Hair.

"Me remember Valley Lily."

With this he walked quickly to the pony, leaped upon his horse, and rode off up the valley on a run.

"Have I done right?" muttered the girl, as she gazed after him until he disappeared from sight.

She looked about her. Five dead Indians lay upon the field, and as many ponies.

It was a sad sight to the young girl, and she shuddered; but, instantly, her face brightened as she murmured:

"A moment later and I would have lain dead on this field, too!"

"So, that was Buffalo Bill? What a splendid, noble looking man! and what a picture of a soldier as he swept by in his charge against odds!"

"I hear no shots down the valley now, and I hope he has not been hurt, he and my brave Black Body-guard."

"Now I know Buffalo Bill can rescue my poor brother—ah! they are coming back," and into view came the scout and his ebon cohorts, while in their midst was an Indian.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A FATAL ERROR.

As the scout came in sight down the valley, Luella walked toward the party.

She saw that the four negroes were with him, and apparently unharmed, and that they had an Indian prisoner and two led ponies they had captured.

Upon the field near her were two other ponies, one of them badly wounded.

It was several hundred yards from where Buffalo Bill had left the bound chief that Luella met the party.

The scout at once sprung from his saddle, dropped his sombrero, and said:

"Miss Lennox, I believe."

"Yes, and you can be none other than Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, so called by bordermen, Miss Lennox; but my name is William Cody. Permit me to say that I am surprised to find you a dweller in this wild land."

"I am here, sir, for reasons not now to be explained; but, allow me to thank you with all my heart for saving my life, Mr. Cody," and the beautiful eyes filled with tears as she held out her hand to the scout.

"Not your life, for surely when you so coolly turned at bay, you knew your horse, and that you could readily escape."

"No, for did you not see that my poor horse was terribly lame, that I turned at bay in desperation? After a rifle shot at the chief it was my intention to send a bullet through my own heart. A moment later and I should have done so—but, you saved me."

The dark face of the scout paled at her words, his lips quivered, and he said in a low, earnest tone: "You would have acted wisely. Thank Heaven, we were on time!"

The sable squad now came up. Each one threw himself from his saddle and grasped Luella's hand with an earnest congratulation at her escape.

"We got the first fire on them, Miss Lennox, which was half the battle, and with the loss of their chief they stampeded and we drove them a mile down the valley."

"They are a hunting party, and will not return. They have lost their chief and one brave captured, half a dozen killed, and think we have help near, so will hasten to get out of the valley."

"Fortunately we did not receive a wound, and if your brother has been captured by the redskins, we can bargain for his release with the two hostages we have secured."

"Oh, Mr. Cody! I fear I have done wrong, if you relied upon the prisoners to save my poor brother."

"Under ordinary circumstances, Miss Lennox, an Indian hostage is of little value, for captives must take their chances as in battle, but with that chief prisoner, I can bring the reds to terms,

and I lassoed this other brave especially to send him to the redskin village with my terms of exchange."

"Oh, what have I done!"

"I do not understand you, Miss Lennox."

"Mr. Cody, I set that chief free!"

"My God! do you mean it?"

"Yes, ah yes!" she moaned.

"But why?"

"An impulse of my heart, for I pitied him; I knew that it was his nature to regard all whites as foes; I was sorry to see his proud spirit broken by captivity, and so I unbound him and told him to take a pony feeding near and go."

"Great Heavens! Why, Miss Lennox, that chief was not an Indian, but a renegade white man!"

"A white man?" echoed Luella, almost stunned by the revelation.

"Yes, a white renegade who has lived for years among the Indians, and is the most inhuman wretch upon this border."

"A white man?" repeated Luella, as though not comprehending fully.

"Have you ever heard of White Coyote, the pale face chief of the Indians on this border?"

"Yes, my brother has often told me of him," answered Luella in a voice now trembling with dread at her act.

"That man was the chief, White Coyote, a veritable fiend in his hatred of his own people."

"Are you sure that it was he?"

"Yes, I recognized him by his long hair—did you not see that it was almost golden?"

"Now you mention it, I do recall that it was, but I supposed it was painted."

"And he had blue eyes."

"Yes, yes, and Indians' eyes are not blue."

"Did he not speak to you in English?"

"He only said:

"Me remember the Valley Lily."

"Yes, it was the White Coyote, and his revolver failed to fire, or I would not have captured him."

"With that man a prisoner, if the Indians have your brother a captive, I could easily make terms with them. You acted as you deemed right, from heart impulse, so do not mind it now, for I can recapture him perhaps."

"Have your men take the dead Indians on to your retreat, to bury them there, for night is at hand. I will pursue the White Coyote and then follow to your home. He went up the valley, of course?"

"Yes," murmured Luella, with a sob; and throwing himself upon his horse the scout dashed away at full speed in chase of the renegade chief.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE BOUND SENTINEL.

It will be recalled that the officer of the day, at Fort Overlook left Gabriel Grandin, the Man Killer of Perdition City, alone in the quarters of a young lieutenant, then on leave—that in the morning it was found Grandin had made his escape and that a party of scouts had started upon his trail.

Without wishing to make the man a real prisoner, Colonel Gardner had been anxious to detain him at the fort until the return of Buffalo Bill, who he felt sure could give him all information regarding the man.

That he had met Gabriel Grandin before the colonel was assured, yet he could not recall when and where, for the life of him.

Reports had come to the fort of his record at Perdition City as a man killer, and in the interest of justice the Colonel wished to know the truth of his having taken human life, whoever the slain men might be.

Now, he came into the fort at night, ostensibly to see Buffalo Bill, but for what reason he would not state.

But, he had not come altogether alone, for he had brought with him the bodies

of two men whom he said he had killed, thus keeping up his unenviable record.

When it was discovered that the Man Killer had so cleverly escaped from the fort, all here felt that he must have had some assistance, or, if not, that he certainly knew the post and its workings most thoroughly.

But a complete search had failed to reveal who had aided him, if any one, or to place any blame upon the sentinels who had connived at his escape.

After the scouts had started upon the trail of the fugitive, the colonel had a long interview with several officers. It was then suggested to have a look at the two dead men brought in, and see if any one would recognize them.

This was done, and no one seemed to have ever met the men.

They were in miners' dress, were well armed, had some money and a few valuables about them, which the Man Killer had not removed.

Then Captain Plummer suggested that the three prisoners, brought in by Buffalo Bill, be shown the two dead men suddenly, and note if they recognized them.

This was decided upon, and they were to be led there and put to the test.

The three prisoners, Red Knife Joe and his companions, had simply been turned over by Buffalo Bill as "suspects."

The scout had said that he had reason to know that they were outlaws, and he would furnish the proof at the proper time.

It was just the hour of guard mount, when the prisoners were to be sent for, and as the lieutenant who was to go after them started, he saw a soldier coming at a double-quick toward headquarters.

"What is it, my man?" asked the officer.

"The captain sent me to report, sir, that the sentinel at the lock-up was just found wounded, gagged and bound, and the three prisoners have escaped, lieutenant," was the startling message of the soldier.

"Follow me," ordered the lieutenant, and he wheeled and went back at a quick step to headquarters.

"Pardon me, Colonel Gardner, but I have returned with this man, who has a strange report to make, sir."

"What is it, my man?" asked the colonel, wondering what he was to hear next.

The soldier told his story, of how, on the rounds, the discovery had been made that the guard at the lock-up had been found bound, gagged and wounded on his post, and the prisoners gone.

The astounded colonel went himself to the lock-up, situated in a remote wing of the fort, amid a grove of pines.

It was a stoutly built log cabin of two large rooms, having one door, and the windows long and narrow, like mere slits, not wide enough to allow a child to squeeze through.

The ceiling and flooring were also of logs, so that escape, save by the door was impossible.

Not another building was within a hundred yards, and only one sentinel was kept on guard there, just before the entrance.

The guard, on its rounds at eight o'clock, had found the sentinel seated on the step, his gun by him, but his feet and hands were securely tied with a lariat, while a gag had been forced into his mouth and tied there securely.

On the back of the sentinel's head was a deep cut, which had bled freely.

But he was conscious, and as soon as he had swallowed some water, told what he knew of how he came to be found in that condition.

He had been pacing to and fro, and when he turned at one corner of the lock-up, he had been dealt a blow and knew no more, until he returned to consciousness and found himself bound

and gagged, but was unable to see if the door of the prison had been opened.

The sergeant had quickly discovered, however, that the double lock on the outside had been forced open and the prisoners had escaped while the sentinel lay unconscious.

The surgeon pronounced the blow to have been dealt from behind, with some blunt instrument, like the barrel of a revolver, and said that it had cut to the bone, and might prove serious.

Colonel Gardner heard all that was to be said, and then remarked in a low tone:

"It was that Man Killer's work, and that is why he came to the fort, to release these prisoners."

"Captain Plummer, order out a troop in pursuit of that man, and a dozen scouts, for he must be brought back, dead or alive."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

When Gabriel Grandin was left alone in the quarters to which he had been taken by the lieutenant he sat down and began to meditate in a calm, matter-of-fact way.

"I don't exactly relish this being a prisoner, for I am nothing more, and it may be that it will turn out seriously for me—in fact, put an end to the work I have in hand," he mused.

"I am sorry Buffalo Bill is not here, for it thwarts my well-arranged plans not to find him."

"But, I will not be foiled. I will meet him yet; and when I do—"

He paused in his musing, for there came a light tap upon the window of his cabin.

What could it mean?

It took nerve for one known as a Man Killer to sit calmly there and know that some one's eyes were upon him from without.

But there he sat until the tap on the window was repeated.

Rising, he approached and gazed out into the moonlight, to behold a man there, crouching beneath the window.

He was looking up, and his finger was upon his lips in token of silence.

The sash was slipped up by Gabriel Grandin, who said in a low tone:

"Well, who are you, and what do you want?"

"I wish to come in. Open the door," was the whispered reply.

The Man Slayer at once went to the door and opened it, as soon as he had drawn down the curtain after lowering the window.

"Come in," he simply said, yet he stood in the shadow, and his hand was upon a revolver.

Into the room strode a large man, dressed in civilian's clothes, and apparently unarmed.

He had a bearded face, and bright, determined eyes, though they wore an anxious expression.

"Ross Ludlow, you here?" queried the Man Killer, with some surprise.

"Yes; I am sutler here at the fort."

"I thought—"

"Yes, you thought I had left the country after I got out of that scrape; but not so. I came to this out-of-the-way spot, and have been sutler at Overlook for a year. I am doing well."

"Am very glad to hear it, Ludlow."

"Thank you, for I know you mean what you say. I am here now to talk about you."

"Well?"

"I saw you come in, and knew you at once."

"I have the full swing of the fort, you know, and I learned enough to discover that you are a prisoner, if you are seemingly free, and you will be severely dealt with for your crimes—"

"My what, sir?"

"They call them crimes here. You killed a scout from this fort at Perdition City some time ago, and the pressure will be to hang you for it, no matter what the man may have been or done."

"They have you in their power now, for you foolishly came here, and, as it were, gave yourself up."

"I do nothing without first thinking it over, Ludlow."

"Yes, I know you are a cool one, and your nerve alone has saved your life, many a time; but you are human, and the pitcher was taken once too often to the well."

"Perhaps. All the same, I must take big chances in the work I happen to have in hand."

"But this is a certainty against you, for your record at Perdition City is well known."

"I thought of running up there to see you, when lo! here you turn up in the very last place on earth you should come."

"I have been in worse places."

"Oh, Overlook Post is pleasant enough in its way, but it is a Government fort, and the soldiers are here to put down the lawless."

"I take the law in my own hands."

"Yes, and that is just what will hang you, sir. Pardon me, but I know it will come to that."

"Think so?"

"I know it, for I have heard enough already to assure that; but even if they don't hang you, they will keep you a prisoner here for a long time."

"Well?"

"I have come here to aid you to escape."

"That looks cowardly."

"It is sensible."

"Well?"

"I wish to help you out of a predicament which I believe will be fatal to you, for I have a good memory."

"Can you do so?"

"Yes, else I should not suggest escape."

"I am not fond of walking."

"You can ride."

"How can you help me?"

"Very easily. I am allowed to go at will, and I just brought some things up to the officers' mess."

"Have you the countersign?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"I can give you an officer's rig, so you can get your horse out. I will bring you your saddle, bridle, and arms, all your outfit, in fact, to your room here, and have you leave the fort by a gate I will direct you to."

As though to carry out his words, that he thought well before acting, Gabriel Grandin was silent a minute or more; then he said, slowly:

"Ross Ludlow, it suits me just now to take advantage of your offer, for I have no desire to be hanged, or to remain here a prisoner."

"I have other work to do."

"You are wise."

"That remains to be seen; but bring the rig you spoke of, my outfit, then give me the countersign and full directions, and I will go."

"Have you money? I am well fixed and can supply you."

"Thanks; I have all I need—am well supplied."

"Then put out your lamp and be ready. I will soon return."

Ross Ludlow left the cabin, while Gabriel Grandin put out the lamp and waited.

CHAPTER XL.

A DOUBLE GAME.

Ross Ludlow, the sutler, proved as good as his word, for he got Gabriel Grandin's outfit, weapons and all. The Man Killer then boldly entered the corral, as has been seen, secured his horse, and, possessing the countersign, rode out of the headquarters gate.

The sutler, waiting until he was sure that he had passed the sentinel all right, then hastened to his own quarters, made up a bundle, and went over toward the wing where the lock-up was.

The moon shone brightly, but the sutler seemed to know that no one was abroad to observe him, and he knew just when and how to avoid the sentries on their posts.

Passing around the grove of pines in which the lock-up was situated, he came up in the rear of the cabin, deposited his bundle, and approached cautiously.

He heard the sentinel walking to and fro on his beat, advising, by the sound of his steps, when he approached the corner nearest to the watcher.

That was the moment for action, and gliding around at his back, the sutler dealt the night guard a severe blow upon the head, with something he held in his hand.

The sentinel went down with a low moan, and without the loss of an instant the sutler bound him with a lariat, gagged him, and also blindfolded him.

Then, with the instrument he had dealt the blow with, he quickly and skillfully removed the staples that held the two locks, and opening the door gently called out:

"Joe Vedder, come here!"

There was a sound of moving feet within, and Red Knife Joe's face appeared at the crack in the door.

"I want you alone, for I must not be seen by your pards."

"Why, it is Ross—"

"Sh—"

"There lies the sentinel, and—"

"Dead?"

"I hope not, but I don't know; may have fractured his skull."

"But I have weapons here for you, blankets, and food. You must get off at once."

"Then you hev proved my friend, Pard Ross."

"Yes; but let me tell you what you are to do."

"All right; I'll do as you say."

"A man left here half an hour ago on horseback. I let him go, and told him that he must wait for me at the bend in the creek, where I would overtake him, and hide his trail so he could not be followed."

"He is well mounted, armed, and has a good outfit, while he's got money to throw to the birds."

"When you get there at the bend, call out that you are from Ross Ludlow, and then let him have it, for he's got to die—see!"

"Yes; and die he does, ef you says so, Ross."

"I do say so."

"But we have got to walk."

"No; I have a few horses, a mile from here, in the valley. You'll find them there, grazing and staked out; for my man goes to look after them every night and morning."

"Hanging in a tree are a couple of saddles; so take two of the horses, your pards riding double, and go to where you will find the man I speak of, and he'll think there are but two of you."

"I see."

"Down him, and take his horse, and then do the best riding of your life, for they'll be hot on your trail by daylight."

"It would not surprise me if this sentinel was dead; he lies so still, and you know they'd hang you for that if they caught you."

"Yes, yes; then let us git away, right off," anxiously urged the prisoner.

"You'll do the man I told you of?"

"Yes, in course we will. Who is he, Pard Ludlow?"

"You'll know him when you see him dead."

"All right; what you say goes. I'm ready."

"Then get your pards and light out. Go right to the stockade wall to the left of the cabin and scale it; then keep straight as the crow flies for the valley where the horses are."

"Take but two of them, as I have arranged—one to carry double. You can't miss them if you keep straight toward the moonlight."

"I'll find them, never fear."

"That done, keep up the creek until you come to the bend where the man will be waiting, for I told him that I would soon follow him with a pard, pretending to be going to Perdition City."

"I see; we'll fix him."

"Then make a start, and write me here, by coach, from Perdition City, for I've got work for you, only you must keep in hiding, or the soldiers will be on to you. But, above all, keep out of Buffalo Bill's way."

"Yes, unless I kin git a shot at him from ambush. I'll jest spike his guns, then, you bet!"

"Don't do it, is my advice; give Buffalo Bill a mighty wide go-by. Now be off!"

The sutler turned from the door and quickly disappeared in the pines.

He heard Red Knife Joe summoning his pards, both of whom were fast asleep, and, a minute later, beheld the three cutthroats pass out of the cabin and proceed hastily toward the stockade.

Watching them, he saw them scale the walls, as directed. That much accomplished to his satisfaction, he returned to the lock-up, dragged the soldier to a sitting posture upon the step, took the handkerchief blind from his eyes, and walked away, muttering:

"I'm glad he's not dead. Didn't want to hurt the poor fellow, but had to."

CHAPTER XLI.

TREACHERY TO A FRIEND.

Red Knife Joe was a thorough plainsman, and the directions given him by the sutler he would follow without a break.

His pards awoke from a sound sleep to find that Joe had in some way secured a chance for all to escape.

He had friends in camp, that was certain, for there was the prostrate sentinel, the bundle, and the open door to prove the presence of a deliverer.

Red Knife Joe kept his own counsel, however, and meant to take all the credit for the escape to himself.

"It's cost me big money, pards, but I worked it, as I thought I c'u'd. I didn't say nothin' to you, 'cause I didn't want ter disapp'int yer; but it's fixed, and we is free."

"Now, foller me close, fer I'll show yer whar we kin git critturs, and then I'll let yer inter a leetle game. I has ter put a light out of a man, and git his boodle—see!"

The two ruffians saw everything in just the light Red Knife Joe wished.

They could hardly believe that they were awake, and one of them said:

"Kick me, Joe, so's ter let me know I hain't asleep and dreaming."

Joe gave him a vicious kick, and convinced the man that he was not dreaming.

"Is you dreamin'; too, pard?" he asked the other.

"No, Joe; I is wide awake," was the answer, as Joe stood ready to kick him, also.

They soon came to the little valley, and found a score of horses staked out there, as the sutler had promised.

"Let us take ther hull outfit, Joe."

"Yes, we kin sell 'em ter Trump Gale, you know."

"No yer don't, fer they'd be in our way. We'll take three of 'em, in case we don't find ther gent waitin' fer us, as I hopes won't be, seein' as how we kin git along without his help."

"One of you fellers has got to ride bareback."

The two men were only too happy to be free and get a mount to worry about riding bareback.

Three of the best horses were selected; the two saddles and bridles hanging in a tree were put on a couple of the animals—the three chosen being the best, as far as the moonlight revealed.

Then the trio mounted, Red Knife Joe leading the way up the bank of the stream.

In a bend of the creek some three miles above waited Gabriel Grandin.

He was giving his horse a rest and letting him crop grass, while he kept his keen-visioned eyes out over the plain.

The spot where he waited was in a bend in the stream, around which was some scattering timber.

Just a quarter of a mile away ran the trail to Camp Terry, and the Man Killer knew by it that he was fully five miles from Fort Overlook.

The moon revealed his handsome face distinctly, and as he paced to and fro, he suddenly stopped and said, half aloud:

"Now, I cannot get the idea out of my mind that Ross Ludlow meant more than he said in wishing me to wait here for him to bring me the things he wished me to take for him to Perdition City."

"Why could he not have given them to me then, and not have detained me an hour or more when time is so precious. The hour is up, yet he is not in sight."

"He aided me to escape, yes; but was it from gratitude, or for a purpose of his own?"

"Somehow, I do doubt him, though, Heaven knows, if he should be true to any man I am that very one."

"I'll take a look at my weapons, and if he does not come in sight then, I shall wait no longer, for now that I have made my escape I do not care to be retaken."

With this he drew one of his revolvers and examined it carefully.

"Every barrel empty, as I live!"

He examined the other also, only to discover that it, too, was unloaded!

Stepping to his saddle, he unslung the rifle from the saddle horn.

Again a surprise.

The rifle was empty!

"Can this be an accident? Were they unloaded when taken from me? No; they were all ready for action. Did Ross Ludlow do this? And, if so, for what purpose?"

The Man Killer seemed more excited and moved than it was his wont to be.

"It looks very suspicious," he muttered; "very much as if I was going to be called and found wanting. But, forewarned is forearmed. I will not be at the mercy of any man."

He turned quickly to his ammunition pouch to reload all the guns, to discover—

Not a cartridge in the pouch!

That discovery decided it. He was purposely sent forth unarmed!

"This is a trap, for a certainty," he spoke aloud; "but I am not yet caught in the trap."

To hastily unfasten his saddle pocket was his next move. This had not been disturbed. He found it full of ammunition for rifle and revolvers, just as he had stowed it.

"He overlooked this, for, somehow, I believe that Ross Ludlow has planned all this, and for a purpose."

"I'll wait for him—if he comes."

There was a world of significance in the prompt action and words of the now thoroughly on-the-alert man.

His excellent weapons were reloaded; then he caught his horse, the one he had obtained from Trump Gale, saddled and bridled him, and waited in the shadow of the trees, perfectly calm, watchful and patient.

The Man Killer was on the war path again!

CHAPTER XLII.

KEEPING UP HIS RECORD.

Gabriel Grandin was as watchful as a hawk.

He expected the sutler to come by the regular trail from Fort Overlook, and closely scanned the plain to see him branch off from it, but he likewise kept a lookout all about him, up and down the stream and across it.

As he turned his gaze down the stream he discerned horsemen in the distance.

Instantly he took from his belt, where

it swung in a holster, a field glass, and turned it upon the party.

"Three of them—three instead of one. Is Ross Ludlow one of the number?"

"I can tell when they come nearer."

"If he is along, then my suspicion of treachery is unfounded and I have wronged him. But, who, if not he, so effectually disarmed me? And why were my weapons tampered with but to leave me helpless in an emergency? For that I must be prepared, in any event."

Nearer and nearer came the three horsemen, who began to ride in single file as they drew closer to the bend, and the field glass of the Man Killer was watching them closely.

Nearer and nearer, until, at last, Gabriel Grandin remarked:

"The man in the lead is not Ross Ludlow; but he may be one of the two in the rear."

The glass was kept at its work of scrutiny, and a few moments later he spoke:

"Ah! I know that man! He is Red Knife Joe, and there is no better time than now to settle old scores."

"They do not come by the trail, but from up the stream, and it is pretty evident that they are coming to find me!"

"Forewarned is forearmed, and I'm ready for them."

"No; Ludlow is not there, but that they come from him I now am certain."

Quietly he then put his glass back in its holster, brought his rifle around for use, stepped a dozen paces from his horse, and stood in the shelter of a large tree.

"I don't want my horse hurt, when bullets begin to fly," he said, with the utmost calmness.

The three men were now within a hundred feet of the timber, but halted at the stern command:

"Halt, there, and say who and what you are."

"I'm the pard who was to join you here, and these is friends of mine," answered Red Knife Joe.

"All right; come along!"

The three men rode forward again, and were within twenty feet of the man hidden in the shadow, when loud rang the words:

"Hands up, Red Knife Joe, or take the consequences!"

The answer of Joe was a mocking laugh, as he spurred forward, followed by the words:

"Guns don't shoot when empty. Ha! ha! Go for him, boys! He's our game now!"

But they were the last words the desperado ever uttered.

The Man Killer had put aside his rifle, and had his revolver drawn. His finger touched trigger, and Ruffian Joe fell dead from his saddle.

The other two men fired at random into the shadows of the timber, when again came the command:

"Hands up, I say!"

One obeyed, drawing his horse to a halt and raising his hands, but the other tried to wheel and dash away.

A sharp report rang out and the man's horse dropped dead, throwing his rider heavily.

"Don't kill me!" he shouted, as he rolled over on his back.

"My hands is up," shouted the other.

"You, sir, bring me your weapons," ordered Grandin to the man on the horse.

The fellow quickly obeyed.

"Now you do the same, sir!"

The other ruffian arose from the ground and surrendered his belt of arms.

Taking the stake rope off the brute which the man rode, Gabriel rapidly and skillfully bound him to his saddle.

"Now mount behind your pard, here, and I'll do as much for you," was the stern order.

The man did as he was told, and he, too, was deftly bound.

The Man Killer then took the blanket that had served as a saddle off the horse he had shot, caught the animal that

had been ridden by Red Knife, and bound the body securely in the saddle.

"Now we are ready to go on our way; but first tell me who sent you here to kill me?"

"It was Red Knife who said we was ter help him out."

"Who told him to kill me?"

"I dunno, boss."

"You are lying to me."

"No, I is not."

"Where did you just come from?"

"Ther fort," and the man seemed to regret his words as soon as uttered.

"Ah! Now tell me who and what you are?"

"We'll make a clean breast of it, pard, fer I knows yer. now—you is the Man Killer."

The frightened man told who they were, that Buffalo Bill had taken them to the fort, and that they had escaped, but Grandin felt sure that they did not know by whose aid, though Red Knife Joe did, of course, for he was the leader in the game.

"Well, men, I think we'll wait here until dawn; then we'll take the trail for the fort, for your attack on me has changed my plans somewhat."

Gabriel Grandin felt sure from what he had heard that Ross Ludlow had freed the men, after aiding him to escape, and had set them upon his trail.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PURSUIT OF THE WHITE COYOTE.

Buffalo Bill dashed off after the White Coyote at a speed that threatened to soon come up with him, for the scout's horse was a very fleet one, while the animal ridden by the renegade was a small Indian pony, and none of the best.

The scout had an idea that if Bert Lennox had fallen into the hands of the Indians, with the White Coyote a prisoner, he could readily make terms for his release, and, although there was a large price on the head of the renegade, and the wish of all at the fort and in the camps along that part of the frontier had been to capture or kill the traitor to his race—one who had proven himself to be utterly merciless—he would make the exchange, man for man, and trust later to get the white chief of the redskins again in his clutches.

So, on Buffalo Bill spurred, keeping up the pace for several miles, and following the fresh trail of the flying pony.

The plan of Buffalo Bill was that night would come on before he caught sight of the renegade, and he could hardly refrain from a shout when, as he rode out of some timber, he discovered the Coyote right ahead of him, riding at a lope.

Evidently the chief had the belief that Buffalo Bill would pursue the redskins further than he did, and night would then aid him to return unseen down the valley and thus escape to the mountains beyond, where the village of the Indians was located, in an almost impregnable country.

His quick ear, however, detected the rapid fall of the hoofs of the scout's horse, and looking back he discovered who it was that was upon his trail.

Instantly his pony was put to its utmost speed, for he only too well realized that Buffalo Bill would prove a deadly foe.

But the scout had come much nearer, after discovering him, before he was known to be in chase, and the moment that the renegade quickened his pace Buffalo Bill cried to his horse:

"Now, old fellow, do your level best, for all depends upon you!"

Away went the pony, straining hard, and on came the splendid horse, to soon show that he held the winning hoof, for he began to gain steadily upon the fugitive.

In vain did the white renegade lash his pony, and then begin to prick him with the point of his knife; but all to

no purpose, as the big horse of the scout bounded on in that steady run that, in the end, must surely win in the race.

Seeing this Cody began to prepare for action, for his Winchester was grasped as if for a galloping shot.

The renegade realized that movement to his dismay, and glanced frightenedly over the range at the sun.

It was still high enough above the horizon to leave enough time for the scout to overtake him before dark!

Then the fugitive looked well ahead. He knew that he must stand at bay, and was looking for a good place to make the halt.

The time had at last come when he must match his strength, his nerve, and his deadly aim with the renowned King of Bordermen.

The White Coyote, in spite of his treachery, was a brave man, and would not have hesitated an instant to turn and fight it out with any other than Buffalo Bill; but with such a terrible dead shot and matchless foe hot upon his trail, he must take all possible advantage of any cover that might present itself.

Far ahead up the valley he saw some scattering bowlders, and a few large pine trees here and there among them; beyond was open country for a couple of miles, with a hill heavily timbered further on.

The latter he could not hope to reach; so, he would halt among the bowlders and stand at bay, for a life and death struggle with Buffalo Bill.

If the scout won in the deadly game, White Coyote would indeed be the king among the people whose chief he was.

If the scout won in the deadly game, then there must the White Coyote meet the doom which his ruthless deeds and infamous alliance with redskins most richly merited by the laws of the frontier, and by the righteous vengeance of those he had so wronged.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE SCOUT AND THE RENEGADE.

The fleeing renegade, White Coyote, watched every boulder, as they came into view, and at last selected his standing ground amid a small group that stood apart.

Straight for this rock group he headed. In their midst grew several trees.

There was not a hiding place within a hundred yards for the scout to take refuge, so the spot was well chosen.

Pushing pony to his hardest, White Coyote dashed in among the rocks, threw himself from the saddle, hastily staked out the panting animal to be at hand if needed again, and then, rifle ready, he sprang to the best shelter he could find.

Buffalo Bill was then within three hundred yards of the renegade's covert; and seeing what the fellow proposed to do, he, too, drew rein, dismounted, and, leaving his bridle reins upon the ground, for his horse to wander at will, he also ran to the shelter of a large rock.

The renegade gave him a shot as he sped along, and the bullet cut up the dirt at the scout's feet, but White Coyote saw that he had made a mistake in firing, for, knowing that his enemy's rifle was then empty, and that he could not bring his revolvers into use at that range, Buffalo Bill ran on like the wind toward a small rock the nearest of all to the Coyote's position.

In vain did the renegade seek to get his rifle reloaded for another shot before the scout reached shelter, for the scout-athlete, running like a deer, reached the rock and crouched down in shelter behind it.

This was the first advantage gained, and it counted much in such a contest.

Once in position, Buffalo Bill began to reconnoiter the situation. He saw that he was within sixty yards of the group of rocks. He further saw that the renegade was not behind the nearest of the bowlders, that one of the three, with two

large trees growing close by it, was nearer to him by thirty feet than the one which sheltered the White Coyote.

"I must gain that position, and then we'll be near enough for pistol practice, and he cannot slip away when dark comes without my knowing it."

So decided the scout, and he at once arranged a plan of operations.

His sombrero was lifted over the rock, when quickly came a shot, and a bullet cut the earth in front.

But the scout did not stir, other than to withdraw the sombrero.

"That was a revolver shot. The wary Coyote don't fool me. I'll try him again."

With this he thrust his sombrero into sight around the edge of the rock, close to the ground.

This time the rifle rang, and the well-aimed bullet cut through the crown of the hat.

With a bound the scout was off, rushing for the nearer rock in the group.

The renegade was hurriedly reloading his rifle, and Buffalo Bill had half covered the distance before his enemy realized how cleverly he had been outwitted.

To finish loading in time to prevent the scout from reaching the nearer cover, the Coyote saw, was quite impossible, so he put down his rifle, drew a revolver, and just as Buffalo Bill was nearing the rock he pulled trigger.

But his hurried aim was not a success. The daring act of the scout had so unnerved him that his second shot was wasted, for even as he pulled trigger Cody had reached his goal.

The White Coyote then realized that the scout had the lead in the game of life and death, for that last hazardous run brought Buffalo Bill within thirty feet of him; and, more, the position was better than his own, for the rock was so large that a scrub pine grew from a crevice in the top, while a large tree was upon either side.

And he realized, also, that there now would be no slipping off in the darkness, when night should come.

Therefore, it was to be a face to face duel with the one man he did fear.

Buffalo Bill was not long in understanding his advantage of situation, but, though anxious to settle the affair before night, so that he could start down the valley to the Hidden Home, he determined not to kill the renegade unless he was driven to it as a last resort to save his own life.

Seeing that he could reconnoiter the position, with the aid of the broken summit of the rock, the pine bush, and the trees growing against it, he suddenly made up his mind to match the renegade chief with a cunning worthy of an Indian.

"It is lucky I brought my lariat and blankets from my saddle," he muttered, and he set to work to carry out the plan determined upon.

CHAPTER XLV.

BUFFALO BILL'S RUSE.

Taking off his hunting coat, Cody put it around his roll of blankets, and with boughs cut from the pine bush he filled up the sleeves.

Then he arranged his sombrero on the top and placed all upon the end of his rifle, making what appeared, at a glance, to be himself.

Coiling his lariat, he then had it ready for instant use. All that being done, he began to play his little game by raising the dummy into view.

A shot almost at once followed, and the dummy dodged from sight.

Again it appeared, but at another spot, to be again welcomed with a shot.

This showed how thoroughly on the alert the renegade was, and with a grim smile Buffalo Bill prepared to play his trump card.

One of the vines grew so near that one end of the big boulder was behind it. He could thus stand on the boulder's top and be sheltered by the large tree.

Watching his chance, Cody thrust the dummy up, so as to appear to be getting upon the rock. That act brought three shots in rapid succession; but the dummy remained on the rock as though kneeling there.

Then Buffalo Bill raised his hand and in such a way that the shots would appear to be the dummy firing. Six times he pulled trigger, the bullets striking on all parts of the boulder sheltering the renegade. Then dropping the little gun he grasped his lariat, and bent the dummy over and outward so as to freely expose it.

Instantly came a rifle shot, and backward fell the dummy, falling hard, and lying exposed to the renegade's view, as he peeped around the edge of his protecting rock.

A yell of triumph broke from the Coyote's lips, and instantly out from his cover, revolver in hand, he bounded, firing shots into the motionless dummy as he advanced.

Buffalo Bill, with a grim smile of delight at the success of his device, was alert for the second act of his drama. He slipped around the other side of the large rock, whirling his lariat as he did so, and just as the White Coyote neared what he supposed to be the dead scout's body, and had emptied the last shot of his revolver, to make assurance doubly sure, the lariat settled about his neck and the astonished renegade was dragged with terrible force, to the earth.

The loop on his throat tightened, and before he could rally the foot of the scout pinioned his right arm to the ground, and the renegade heard the threatening words:

"Resist, and you are a dead man, White Coyote!"

"I know when to pass, Buffalo Bill," was the sullen response, uttered with difficulty.

"It is well you do, for I have called you, Coyote. Now I want that little gun of yours," and the scout bent over and drew the one still loaded revolver from the renegade's belt, his empty weapon lying on the ground where it had fallen.

"You shot my hat and coat full of holes, and my blankets will have to be patched, too, but I forgive. You didn't know any better.

"Now, renegade and outcast, I would like to remind you of that letter you once tacked up on the stockade wall of the post, telling me that my days were numbered if I did not leave this frontier within thirty days.

"The time was up last night, Coyote, and I am not only still here, but have you ready for a fort pow-wow."

"Yes, curse you, and will likely have the satisfaction of seeing me hanged like a dog."

"Only yourself to blame if I have that pleasure. But I was anxious to take you alive for a particular reason which I will explain later. Now you must go with me."

"Where to—to the fort?"

"Never mind where. You are wanted in more places than one—hold! Though I wanted you alive, I shall kill you if you force me to do so," and the scout again put his revolver muzzle close to the face of the prisoner, who muttered:

"I have too much faith in the belief that I was not born to be hanged, not to bide my time, so I will give you no trouble."

"A level head you have in that respect."

Cody proceeded at once to bind his hands behind his back; that done he ordered him to stand upon his feet.

The man obeyed, sullenly enough, and leading him to his pony the scout aided him to mount, and with the other end of the lariat bound him to the Indian saddle.

"Now I'll put on my coat, and we'll take a ride. Ah, I forgot; you are to be blindfolded."

With his large silk bandana Buffalo Bill then blindfolded the prisoner; after

which he put on his own coat, again, loaded up all the weapons, should they be needed, and led the way to where his horse was leisurely feeding.

Mounting him, he started off down the valley, the Indian pony trotting by his side, just as the sun sank from sight behind the range across the valley.

It had been scout against outcast and desperado, and scout had won—as he usually did. That was but one more brilliant achievement to add to the roster of his memorable acts.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE UNKNOWN.

"Well, Cody, no wonder you have won the name of King of Scouts, and I really begin to believe you do possess a charmed life."

So said the renegade White Chief as he rode along by the side of his captor, bound and blindfolded.

"Why do you believe that, White Coyote?" asked the scout carelessly.

"Well, I know of many a plan to capture, kill, or down you, and yet you are on top—have never been downed."

"I was born for luck, as the sooth-sayers of old would remark, and believe in a certain destiny that shapes our ends, so I take chances often where other men might not do so; but I felt it in my bones that I would either kill or capture you, when you put that placard on the fort gate."

"Well, you have done so, and I suppose I will hang, despite my belief that I was not born to be strung up by the neck."

"There is no doubt but what you will in the end be strung up by the neck, but whether you do this time remains for yourself to decide."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked the man, while a sudden gleam of hope passed over his hard face at the scout's words.

"You will know later."

"Later? Why not now, Cody?"

"I have my reason."

"Well, if you won't tell me that, tell me at least what that beautiful girl is to you."

"The one that foolishly set you free, prompted by her good heart?"

"Yes, yes, it was noble in her; that I'll admit."

"It came very near being the mistake of her life."

"How so?"

"She would simply have turned loose a bloodhound upon her own track."

"Do you mean that I would have harmed her, after her act to me?"

"I do not like to say harsh things of one who is wholly in my power, but you have not one atom of mercy in your nature for man, woman, or child; you are an out and out renegade to your race, as merciless as the animal for which you are named, and whose cunning and deviltry you appear imbued with;—but, I am wrong to talk thus at one who cannot strike back," said the scout, led away by his feelings against the man whose life had been stained with the foulest crimes.

"You have not answered my question."

"What was it?"

"Who was that beautiful girl, and what is she to you?"

"To the latter I will answer, she is no more to me than any woman whom I find in need of my aid, for I never saw her in my life before this afternoon."

"You saved her from becoming my captive."

"Heaven have mercy upon her, had she met such a dire fate!"

"I have lately heard that there was a Gold Hunter in the Shadow Valley, which place, you doubtless know, the Indians dread, being the abode of evil spirits?"

"Yes, I know."

"I had difficulty in getting those braves to follow me into the valley to-day, and now it will be hard indeed to get one to go there again."

"I am glad of it."
 "And few white men go there, as they, too, have a superstitious dread of the place."
 "So I have heard."
 "You do not dread it?"
 "Why should I?"
 "That is true, for you dread nothing."
 "I should have to live as many men do, in constant fear of death."
 "I fear death, yet, like you, I have trusted in my lucky star to always save me."
 "I guess that star is about set, now."
 "I don't believe it."
 "That's right, keep up your nerve."
 "But who is that girl?"
 "I told you I had never seen her until I rescued her from your clutches."
 "She must belong to the family they say dwells in the valley, composed of a gold seeker, a woman, and four negro guards, I had heard, but am now sure of."
 "Doubtless."
 "I came into the valley to hunt up that house, for I have been told that the gold hunter has an enormous fortune in nuggets hidden away. If I could find that cache, I'd turn honest man, and enjoy life far from here for all the rest of my days."
 "If any amount of gold could bring you happiness, you must indeed be devoid of all conscience, after the crimes you have been guilty of."
 "I have schooled myself to forget, Buffalo Bill."
 "Who are you, anyway?"
 "A man who was born to dishonor, and driven to a life of crime. Fate went back upon me, and I turned against my race when men and women turned against me."
 "On account of your own acts?"
 "Granted; but they did so, and, unable to live with my own people, I fled to the Indians to escape the gallows, and seek a revenge that an unkind destiny drove me to."
 "What I am, Buffalo Bill, you know, for you see me a renegade to my race, you know of my red deeds, and that there is a big price upon my head; but, who I am, no one shall know, for I am without name, country, or friends, and when I die my grave shall bear that one sad word—*Unknown*."

CHAPTER XLVII.

REVEALED BY THE MOONLIGHT.

The renegade seemed to have his cruel past flash upon him in all its horror and guilt, and he spoke with a depth of feeling the scout had not believed him capable of, and especially after his boast that he had no conscience.
 "Well, I am sorry for you, and that is all I care to say."
 "We all have the making or marring of our lives. You saw fit to mar yours, and few men have the world turn against them without some act of their own."
 "I am sorry for you, but that is all I can say. As you went on the wrong trail you must take the consequences."
 "I ask no man's pity, Buffalo Bill, and shall face all consequences when the time comes, but now, even when I am your prisoner, I feel that I shall go free—that fortune will yet come to me, and I be free to enjoy life with my conscience so schooled that no haunting shadows will disturb my dreams."
 Buffalo Bill made no reply. It puzzled him to feel, with all his knowledge of men, that he had found one who possessed the nature of the redskins whom he served, and whose teachings were to kill and know not remorse.
 As the scout did not reply, the renegade asked again:
 "But who is that girl?"
 "I know nothing more of her than do you. Perhaps later you may learn something more of her."
 "Why do you blindfold me?"
 "Because I do not care to have you see where I am taking you."

"It cannot be to the fort, for you would not blindfold me to go there."
 The scout was silent, but suddenly the renegade broke out with:

"Great God! you are taking me to Perdition City."

"Why do you think so?"

"I feel it! I know it! You are afraid you will lose me if you take me to the fort, for you know I have a friend there who would rescue me."

"You know that it takes large bodies a long time to move, that, tried by the military, it would be a long time, perhaps, before I was convicted and sentenced, and in that time I could escape."

"So, to prevent this, you are carrying me, in pretended ignorance of the consequences, into Perdition City, and that means my instant death at the hands of a merciless mob."

The renegade had lost his stolid demeanor and effrontery; he had become alarmed—was greatly excited at thought of being taken to the camps, well knowing that the people there would show him no mercy.

But Buffalo Bill's words relieved his mind, for the scout responded:

"I do nothing underhand, and I know full well the consequences should I take you to the camps—that it would take a hundred soldiers to protect you from the people of Perdition City."

"You have been captured by me, and it is not my intention to have a mob take you from me."

"Thank God for that!"

"The name of the Almighty upon your lips is blasphemy."

"Yes; I suppose that it is so; but let me tell you that I did not mean what I said just now about having a friend in the fort; I merely said so for a bluff."

"I could hardly believe that you could have a friend among honest men," returned the scout; but he was bluffing now, and meant to allay suspicion.

The words of the renegade had, however, fairly startled Buffalo Bill when he heard them.

He would not forget them, for he knew that they were true—that the outcast had uttered them thoughtlessly, but all the same that the ruffian did have a friend at the fort!

The moon had now risen, but the scout kept on down the valley at a steady pace.

He came to the battlefield of the afternoon, and saw that the coyotes were busy at the bodies of the ponies then slain; but he made no comment, and would not raise his voice to drive them off, knowing that the renegade would at once know where they then were, and that fact he wished to keep a secret.

Passing on, it was Cody's intention to camp, after a few miles, and wait for the Sable Samsons to find him in the morning, for he knew that he could not track them by night to their Hidden Home.

By daylight he could do so, he felt assured; if the Black Guard did not find him first, and he believed they would be searching for him.

So on he went until at last he decided to go into camp, and was looking for a good spot when he saw a form ahead in the moonlight.

"Instantly he halted, hobbled the prisoner's horse, and rode ahead, without a word of explanation, toward the one who was now plainly visible in the moonlight, having come out from under the shadow of a high cliff."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE RETURN OF THE MAN KILLER.

Gabriel Grandin waited in the belt of timber until dawn before carrying out his determination to start for the fort.

He wished to arrive there in broad daylight, when he would be taken at once to the commandant, to whom he could explain what he wished as to his escape, and his return with the two prisoners and the body of Red Knife Joe.

"It is strange that I must again go to the fort with a dead body; but so it must be, and I cannot shirk the task put upon me."

"I will, no doubt, be pursued as soon as it is light enough to enable them to follow my trail, but by going the direct way I will avoid those sent after me."

So he said, and as the dawn began to appear he made his preparation for departure.

He had bound the body of Red Knife Joe upon the horse he had ridden, but, having shot one of the other animals, he mounted the two prisoners double.

When all was in readiness the Man Killer got into the saddle, and led the way toward the stage trail, just as the sun appeared above the distant mountains.

Owing to the nature of the ground, Grandin knew, from having followed it the night before, that the stage trail was a winding one, and it would take him some time to reach his course.

The two prisoners were sullen and scared-looking, for they were crushed at having been recaptured, and alarmed at the belief that Red Knife Joe had really killed the soldier guarding the lock-up.

Gabriel, after a long talk with the two men, believed what they told him—that Red Knife Joe had plotted their escape, and carried it out successfully, but with whom they did not know.

He seemed glad of this, for reasons of his own, yet told them that they would be deemed guilty in spite of all they said, but might be given terms if they would confess who had aided them.

"Then we has ter hang, fer we don't know," averred one of the prisoners, disconsolately, while the other betrayed abject terror at the fate threatening them.

The fort scouts had long started upon the trail of the Man Killer, and Captain Plummer's troop had followed, to run down the daring man, regarded by all as the one who had not only cleverly made his own escape, but had aided the other three prisoners in doing so.

The garrison had settled down to patiently await the result of the pursuit, when the sentinel in the lookout tower reported a small party of horsemen in sight.

All eyes were upon them as they approached, and they appeared to be two horsemen, with a led horse carrying a burden.

As they drew nearer to the fort entrance, the lieutenant who had conducted Gabriel Grandin to his quarters the night before called out:

"Why, one is the Man Killer!"

"Yes, sir; and the other is one of the three prisoners brought in by Buffalo Bill," added a sergeant.

"Why, there are two men on one horse!" an officer called out.

This was acknowledged to be the case, and then another remarked:

"And the led animal is carrying a dead body!"

This fact was also acknowledged, and the interest increased in a wonderful degree when it was reported that the Man Killer was returning, leading a horse with a dead man in the saddle, and another upon which rode two men securely bound, while the latter and the body were surely the three prisoners who had escaped from the lock-up.

"And while a hundred men are out on a hunt for them, they calmly ride back to the fort!" observed the officer of the day, as he moved forward to meet the party.

Arriving within a hundred yards of the stockade, Gabriel Grandin halted, dismounted, and left his horse and the others standing in the trail, while he walked forward, and, calling to the officer of the day, asked if he would meet him alone, as he had a word especially for him.

The officer, Captain Boyd, at once walked forward, and, meeting the Man Killer, who saluted politely, asked:

"Well, sir, what have you to say to me?"

"Is the soldier who guarded the lock-up from which the three prisoners escaped dead, may I ask, sir?"

"He is not, but he had a narrow escape."

"Then, sir, the prisoners I bring in must believe that he is dead; so will you kindly allow no one to answer, should they ask the question, and then kindly lead me to Colonel Gardner?" asked the Man Killer.

"I will do as you request, sir," answered Captain Boyd, after a moment of hesitation.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE MAN KILLER HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

Colonel Gardner could hardly believe what he heard, when told that Gabriel Grandin was boldly coming back to the fort, and with the very prisoners whom he was supposed to have aided to escape with him.

"I wish to have all of them sent at once to me," he ordered.

In the mean time Captain Boyd, after his talk of a minute with the Man Killer, returned to the stockade, and at once gave orders that no one should answer a question the prisoners might ask, but maintain a complete silence.

The Man Killer returned to his horse, mounted, and rode on, the observed of all as he reached the stockade, for half the garrison had assembled to see the return of the escaped prisoners.

As they passed through the gate Captain Boyd called out:

"Follow me, mounted as you are. The guard fall in behind!"

"Say, pards, is that soldier dead who guarded us?" cried one of the prisoners, unable longer to stand the suspense, and asking the question of the soldiers nearest to him as he passed by.

But no reply was given. Every soldier was silent and stern-looking.

Toward headquarters Captain Boyd led the way, Gabriel Grandin's face stern and unmoved as he calmly followed, wholly unmindful of the hundreds of curious eyes turned upon him, for all now knew him as the man who bore the sobriquet of the Man Killer of Perdition City.

Arriving before headquarters, Grandin dismounted, and a word to Captain Boyd kept the prisoners still mounted and under guard.

"Colonel Gardner, I have to report the prisoner of last night, sir, as having returned, bringing with him the body of one of the three who escaped from the lock-up, and the other two bound and his captives.

"He desired to see you, sir, so I brought him at once to headquarters. The others are outside, under guard."

"It was just what I wished, Captain Boyd," answered the colonel, acknowledging the salute of the officer as he turned and went back to his duties.

Then the colonel bent his gaze upon Gabriel Grandin and said, sternly:

"Now, sir, what have you to say in defense of your escape last night, striking the sentinel a blow that well-nigh proved fatal, and aiding the other prisoners to go with you?"

A surprised look came upon the face of Gabriel Grandin at the words of Colonel Gardner, and he earnestly answered:

"I certainly acted wisely, Colonel Gardner, in returning to the fort, when I now learn from your words that I am believed to have been the one to aid those men to escape, using force in doing so."

"And did you not, sir?"

"No, sir! On the contrary, I have captured two of them and killed one, and returned to the fort to deliver up the dead man and his two comrades as prisoners."

"You certainly made your escape."

"Oh, yes, sir; I did that, for I discovered, as I believed, that I was to be held a prisoner to stand trial for crimes of which I am accused; and as detention

just now would greatly interfere with my plans, I decided, as the opportunity offered, to escape—take my departure."

"You were aided in doing so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who was the traitor in my camp?"

"Colonel Gardner, I am not here now to make a charge against any one. I was aided, yes, and the one who helped me I then believed acted from gratitude and friendship, for he owes both to me.

"But I have since ascertained that he also aided those three ruffians to escape, and for a purpose—the main one being that they should follow me and kill me, thus putting a man who could tell a life secret out of the way, and having his murderers secure my money and outfit."

"I suspected him, while waiting, as he requested, for him to come and join me, bringing something for me to carry to Perdition City for him."

"That wait was his trap to get me killed; but I have grown cautious and suspicious in the career I lead, and thus saved my life."

"The man known as Red Knife Joe I had to kill, as also the horse of one of the other men; but I took them prisoners, and decided to bring them back to your keeping."

"The man, Red Knife Joe, is the only one of the three ruffians who knew who it was that aided his escape, as he did mine. The other two were not in the secret, I am confident, and so do not know his identity."

"I made the request of the officer of the day that no questions should be answered which they should ask, thus allowing them to believe that the sentinel really was dead, for with that to hold over them, if they do know, they can be forced to tell under a promise of mercy to the one who confesses."

"This is the situation, Colonel Gardner, as it is," and Gabriel Grandin spoke in a calm and courteous manner that deeply impressed the colonel with all the remarkable man said.

CHAPTER L. COUNTERFEITS.

After a moment of silence, as though pondering well his words before he uttered them, Colonel Gardner replied to Gabriel Grandin:

"I see no reason to doubt what you tell me of your escape; but you know who it was that released those men as well as yourself?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You were first allowed to go?"

"I was."

"With your horse, weapons, and all as you came?"

"Yes, sir, save the two dead men whom I brought in, and had no desire to take away with me."

"Ah, I remember."

"I have ordered them buried this morning, and they have been recognized as desperadoes of the camps."

"Yes, sir."

"You got your horse out of the corral?"

"I did, sir."

"How did you do it?"

"I first played the private soldier and went in for him, and then, to leave the fort I had an officer's disguise."

"You had these uniforms furnished you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You also had the countersign given you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then?"

"I left by the gate in the rear of your quarters, Colonel Gardner, and went to the rendezvous to await my rescuer."

"Instead, came the three men, whom he sent to kill me."

"You knew nothing of their escape?"

"No more, sir, than that the same one who aided me helped them."

"Now I wish to know who this traitor is?"

"First, sir, try and find out from one of the men I brought in if they really know, by promising mercy to the man who tells."

At once Colonel Gardner called to his orderly and ordered the two prisoners to be at once brought before him.

For some reason he was willing to follow Gabriel Grandin's suggestion.

The two ruffians came in, white-faced and scared, their arms still bound behind their backs.

"Men, who aided you to escape last night?" sternly demanded the colonel.

Neither man knew and so answered.

"How did you escape?"

One of them told the story, just as it had occurred—how they were awakened by Red Knife Joe and found the door of the lock-up open, the sentinel, as they feared, dead, and that their leader had told them he had a friend in camp who had aided them, and in return they were to go to a certain point and kill the man they found there, whose weapons were not loaded.

The Man Killer then explained how he had discovered that not a weapon had a charge in it, and then, put on his guard by that fact, he had loaded them to be ready for what was to come.

"Now which one of you men will accept mercy from me—save his neck, in fact—by telling me who was the one that aided you to escape and gave the order for the murder of this gentleman, here?"

"Oh, Lordy, ef I only know'd it; but Joe wouldn't tell us, sir," declared one.

"I see that you prefer to hang rather than tell. All right! I'll make short work of you," promptly assured the commanding officer.

But the two trembling wretches were pitifully positive that they did not know the secret, which Red Knife Joe held within lips forever sealed.

Calling the orderly, the colonel sent the men to the lock-up, to be put in irons, and with a double guard over them.

Then he turned again to Gabriel Grandin and said:

"I am convinced that they do not know."

"As I am, sir."

"But you do?"

"Of course, sir."

"And will tell me?"

"Colonel Gardner, I am anxious to have you put faith in me, sir. You know me as the Man Killer, and I can at this time tell you no more of myself; but I have brought you those prisoners in evidence of my good faith. I desire you to let that act stand in my favor."

"Do not regard me as a prisoner, but allow me to go to my quarters, and there have a talk with the person who aided me."

"I wish to hear what he has to say—to let him believe that I do not doubt him—to assure him that his secret is safe. By so doing you will discover much more of importance that you should know."

"If you decline my request, you will fail to make important and necessary discoveries."

"I know it is much to ask of you, sir, but to further prove my good faith let me ask you: What was done with the large sums of money taken from the bodies of the two men I brought in, dead?"

"The paymaster has it in keeping."

"And did not these men, Red Knife Joe and his companions, have a large amount on them when brought in by Buffalo Bill?"

"They did."

"And it, also, is in the keeping of the paymaster?"

"It is."

"Then I will request you, sir, to have all the money brought here by the paymaster, and I will prove to you that every dollar of it is counterfeit; and more: If you will have the two prisoners led to where the bodies of the two men are

killed and brought in last night, will readily see that they know them comrades in guilt. They do not know that they have been slain, so will betray themselves in the presence of the dead."

CHAPTER LI.

A FRAUD REVEALED.

Every word the Man Killer uttered only served to interest Colonel Gardner more and more in the strange man—the human puzzle.

The commanding officer was perfectly convinced that, whatever he might be guilty of, the unknown was a very uncommon and mysterious personage—one who must be playing a part for some profound purpose.

"Mr. Grandin, I am giving you free rein, you see, allowing you to conduct your own case. I will send for the paymaster to come here with the money you claim to be counterfeit, as you request."

The orderly was at once dispatched to the paymaster's quarters with a note from the colonel.

The disbursing officer soon appeared carrying a satchel.

"Paymaster Benson, will you look over the money taken from the prisoners brought in by Buffalo Bill, and also that taken from the bodies of the two men this gentleman brought in last night?"

"Yes, sir; I have it all here."

"The different moneys you kept separate, I suppose, Mr. Benson?"

"Yes, sir; each package is marked."

"You, of course, understand money pretty well, Mr. Benson?"

"Yes, sir."

"Look over all you have there and tell me your opinion of it."

The paymaster obeyed, not seeming to understand the drift of the colonel's command, for such it was.

"Here is the gold, and the silver—considerable of the former, but only half a hundred of the latter."

"The paper money, sir, is mostly new, as Government sends it to us, and ranges from five-dollar bills to one hundred."

"And all good money, Mr. Benson?"

"As far as I discover, sir."

"Look closely."

The paymaster did so, and replied:

"If it is not all genuine, it is a most excellent counterfeit; but I would have to put each bill to the test, sir, to discover the counterfeits, if any there are among the bills."

The colonel turned to Gabriel Grandin, who now spoke in his courteous, quiet way:

"Paymaster Benson, every silver piece, every gold coin, and each bill in all you have there is a counterfeit."

"Impossible, sir!" betraying great astonishment at the statement.

"Allow me to prove it."

Taking from his pocket a small box, he revealed tiny scales, a small bottle containing a liquid, and several other things.

"You see, sir, neither the silver nor gold stands the test of weight or acid."

"They are beautiful counterfeits, and would be passed by experts if not tested," he remarked, after a few moments of experimentation.

"The paper money is the same; for see the result of the wetting I give this bill; it will not stand dry as the Government paper does; it easily water-soaks, yet it would not be detected by mere sight or feeling."

Grandin had poured some water into a tumbler and placed the bill into it.

Then he added:

"A further proof, however, is not wanting, for the plate from which these bills were printed has several errors, and though these errors or variances are of a minute kind, yet, once pointed out, can be readily detected."

"I will show them to you, sir."

The paymaster was dumfounded, but as soon as convinced, and said, in a low voice:

"Then every dollar of this money, paper and coin, is counterfeit?"

"Yes, sir; and my word for it that there is plenty more in circulation in this very fort—in fact, more spurious money than what is real."

"You think that?" from the colonel.

"I know it, sir."

"Will you explain, Mr. Grandin?"

"Certainly, colonel. Paymaster Benson received a large lot of money a month ago to pay off with, I believe?"

"Yes; that is true."

"The stage was halted, the money taken from the strong box, which was sealed and addressed to the paymaster."

"It was kept for half an hour by the road-agents, who then returned it, as the leader of the outlaws said he feared to break open a Government package, especially as it might not contain money, but papers."

"That is what the driver of the coach reported."

"Then you did not think the box had been broken open?"

"No, sir; it had not been opened; its lock and seals were intact."

"You are mistaken, Paymaster Benson; it was opened and counterfeit money was put in the place of the genuine, marked exactly as the good bills were. That done, the treasure box was re-sealed with wax and the Government stamp was given the seals. All was apparently as before—exactly as if the box had not been disturbed."

Colonel Gardner and the post paymaster were two astonished men at what they heard, and the commander said:

"This is most startling information, Mr. Grandin."

"Colonel Gardner, now that I have heard what this gentleman tells us, I am sure he is right, for every package of that money had been tied up again, as I saw; and other things looked curious; but as the amount invoiced was all there, to a dollar, I thought no more of it."

"Have you any of that money not yet paid out, sir?" asked Grandin.

"Yes; several hundred dollars are yet undisbursed."

"If you will get it I will show that the counterfeit proof is upon it."

The paymaster hastened away to his quarters, but, quickly returning with the crisp new bills, he placed them before the inscrutable stranger.

A brief examination of the bills revealed that they were perfect fac-similes of the money taken from the prisoners and dead bodies brought in by Buffalo Bill and Gabriel Grandin, and Colonel Gardner exclaimed, excitedly:

"This is a most astounding fraud, and we owe the discovery to you, sir, whatever and whoever you may be."

CHAPTER LII.

UNSUSPECTED.

That the paymaster was as much disturbed by the discovery of the amazing fraud, so cleverly consummated, as was Colonel Gardner, his countenance plainly indicated.

He looked at his superior officer, then at Gabriel Grandin, and yet uttered no word.

But the Man Killer wore no look of triumph. His face was as serene as ever, and in answer to the last words of the colonel he said:

"I happen to know of this fraud, sir, but the discovery was made too late to prevent it."

"The money taken from the treasure box, however, let me inform you, is safe, though it cannot be restored just now."

"Ah! that at least is good news; and let me confess, Mr. Grandin, that you spring surprises upon me which I cannot as yet quite comprehend; but the more I see of you the more confidence I begin to feel in you, stranger though you are."

"Thank you, Colonel Gardner; but let me now request that this counterfeit money discovery be kept as a dead secret, at least for some time."

"It shall be as you wish, Mr. Grandin."

"You hear, Paymaster Benson?"

"Yes, sir; and will, of course, comply."

"Well, you can take your spurious money back to your strong box, Mr. Benson; lock it up and put the seal upon what has happened here, as well, for that more developments are to come I now fully realize."

"I understand, sir," and thanking Gabriel Grandin feelingly for what he had revealed, the paymaster gathered up the now worthless "cash" and departed.

As soon as he was gone Colonel Gardner said, frankly:

"Mr. Grandin, you are no longer a prisoner, sir, and can come and go at will."

"Who you are, what you are, I am, of course, interested to know; but I leave it to you to make this mystery plain when you deem it best to do so."

"Thank you, sir."

"You can have your same quarters, sir, and if I can serve you in any manner, command me."

"I may have to call upon you, sir."

"I will be ready when you do; but may I not soon hope to know who is this traitor in my camp—the man that set you free, and those three prisoners also?"

"I am sorry to say not now, sir, for only by perfectly keeping my secret can I make certain of the discoveries which are necessary to the right conclusion of my work."

"The guilty person must not suspect that there is a shadow of suspicion upon him; he must be wholly unsuspected, sir; otherwise his artful secret work cannot be met by counter plot and final exposure."

"I believe I now well appreciate that, and so repeat that you are free to act in your own way. In your own good time you will unfold this whole riddle to me, I am sure."

"I assuredly will, sir."

"But answer me one question, please?"

"Well, sir, if I can."

"Is Buffalo Bill in this secret with you?"

After a moment's hesitancy the Man Killer replied:

"No, sir; no one shares my secret, thus far. I am alone in my work. I do not even know Buffalo Bill, save by sight."

The colonel bowed, and soon after the orderly was sent for to conduct Gabriel Grandin to his quarters, which he was to occupy at his pleasure—free to come and go at will, and to receive the courteous treatment of the commandant's guest.

Hardly had Gabriel been left alone in his quarters when he made a hasty toilet, went to breakfast in the single officers' hall, and then asked where he could make certain purchases of articles required for his comfort.

He was directed to the sutler's store, and found it to be quite an extensive affair for an army post.

The clerk told him that Sutler Ludlow was just up, as he always slept late, and Grandin said that he would wait to see him, as they were old friends.

"Go into that room, sir, and he will be there to have his breakfast in a few minutes," said the clerk.

Gabriel did so, and found that the sutler had a very cozy little sitting room, and a table set for his late breakfast.

Ross Ludlow's coming was not long delayed. He started back, uttered an exclamation, and leant heavily upon the wall for support, as he opened the door and beheld his visitor.

Grandin at once sprang toward him and cried:

"Fool! what ails you? Do you wish to give it away that you aided me? I thought you had more nerve!"

The sutler rallied.

"Did they recapture you?" he asked, in an agitated voice.

"No; I came back of my own free will, for I struck it rich, as three men attacked me, while I was waiting for you. I killed one and captured the other two, so decided to bring them back to the fort, for they told me they had escaped from here."

"Yes, yes; but which one did you

kill?" gasped Ludlow, his face ghastly pale.

"A desperado known as Red Knife Joe."

"Thank God!"

"What?"

"I say thank Heaven you killed him, for he has been a terror; but did they escape from the fort?"

"Yes; last night."

"I went to bed after seeing you—"

"Sh—!"

"No one is near to hear me. I sleep late, so heard nothing of this; but are you not held as a prisoner?"

"No; the colonel does not consider me a prisoner since I brought back those two escaped men."

"Good! But did the sol—the man, I mean, die?"

"What man?"

"The one you shot."

"Oh, yes; and the men I brought in are in a bad way, for the soldier who stood guard over them is badly hurt."

Grandin saw Ludlow's start, but appeared not to notice it, and told him he wished to make some purchases, and, as he was his only friend in the fort, he would spend much of his time with him.

The agitated sutler forced an appearance of pleasure over the news, and soon produced the things Grandin wanted, and his thoughts as he saw his caller walk away thus took form:

"A very close call for me; but he does not suspect. I am still on top; but he must die next time, sure! His death now is more necessary than ever."

CHAPTER LIII.

JERRY ON THE WATCH.

"I does believes dat is Mars' Buf'ler Bill!"

"It's lucky I come down here to de cliff ter keep watch, and not let him go by de place."

So said Jerry, as he stood looking up the Shadow Valley and saw what at first appeared to be a single horseman come into view in the distance.

But the moonlight soon after revealed that there were two horsemen, and Jerry exclaimed, in a tone of delight:

"I declar! Ef he hain't got dat white Injin Missy Luella let go, and cotch him 'live, too!"

"Well, it's just what dey do say of Mars' Buf'ler Bill, dat he can't be beat by no man."

"I'll jist walk out and show myself, and if it don't be Mars' Bill and de White Injin den dere's g'wine ter be a fight or a foot race, and I knows right now who's going ter do de racin'."

But it happened to be Buffalo Bill and his prisoner, the White Coyote, so Jerry did not have to do any running.

He had gone down to the barrier to stand guard, for he knew that, owing to the rock soil just there, no trail led into the little vale where was the Hidden Home, and the scout would go by even in the daylight, good trailer though he was.

Luella had supposed, as the Black Guard also did, that the scout, if not able to come up with the White Coyote before nightfall, would turn and come back in search of the Hidden Home, and if not headed off would pass the entrance in the moonlight and continue on up the valley.

They did not take into consideration the great speed of the scout's horse, and that the chief's own fleet pony had been killed, while the broncho upon which he had fled was one of the ordinary animals of the band—both circumstances enabling Buffalo Bill to come up with the fugitive much sooner than he otherwise would have done.

The Black Guard had gathered the bodies of the slain redskins, and, with the prisoner, had carried them on up to the Hidden Home.

The prisoners, by the order of Luella Lennox, was securely blindfolded, that he might not know whither he was taken, and when they reached the home he was

taken into one of the cabins and secured there.

The dead bodies were put over in the pines for burial, and the huge mastiff, Grab, was placed as a guard over them.

Quickstep's shout of welcome to her mistress and the Black Guard could have been heard a mile away, for she had begun to dread that she would be called upon to mourn her loss as well as that of her master, Bert Lennox.

Going down to the barrier, she had waited there, crying and moaning, as she felt that at last the little home was visited by dire disaster.

But she was as happy as a child at the return, not only of Luella, but of the Black Guard.

When Jerry, who had gone on guard duty alone at the barrier, save for the companionship of Grip, was certain that one of the horsemen was none other than Buffalo Bill, he boldly walked forward to meet him.

"Ho, Jerry; is that you?" asked the scout, but in a low tone, for he did not wish the prisoner to hear what passed.

"Yes, Mars' Buf'ler Bill, an' mighty glad ter see you, sah."

"Missy Luella will be awful tickled also, sah, as will all of us niggers."

"I am glad to know I have such good friends, Jerry; but I have a prisoner yonder."

"Der White Injin Missy Luella let go, sah?"

"Yes."

"You cotch him all right, then?"

"Yes; and nobody hurt. But I have got him blindfolded, and I do not wish him to know where he is being taken, so no one must speak when near him, or let him know aught of his surroundings."

"I understand, sah."

"Then go ahead, Jerry. I will follow when you have told Miss Lennox what my wish is, for should he escape, he would very quickly lead a band of braves against her home."

"He would dat, sah. I'll go ahead and tell her, sah, and fix a place for him."

"We blindfolded de red Injin, too, sah, and has de dead ones all safe ober in de pines."

"Oh, yes, Jerry; the dead ones are all right, no doubt."

"Don't min' de bars, sir, for I'll send one ov de boys down to close 'em up, and I'll be on hand ter guide you when you gits near de cabins, sah."

With this Jerry walked rapidly back toward the cliff and disappeared in its shadow.

Buffalo Bill marked well the spot where he disappeared, and observing the nature of the rock soil beneath him, he said:

"A well-chosen retreat, indeed, for no trail could be made here."

Returning to the prisoner, he again moved on. He rode in under the shadows of the cliff, and noted how obscure the entrance was; he passed through the log barrier, which Jerry had lowered, and came in sight of the lights from the Hidden Home of the Man of the Mountains, who had so mysteriously disappeared on his return to his retreat, accompanied by his Black Guard.

As Buffalo Bill came in sight of the lights of the cabins, there came to his ears a sound that he well knew betokened danger.

It was the fall of many hoofs upon the rocky soil without!

There was a dull thud, no ring to the hoof-falls, and this told him the horses were unshod, and therefore must have Indian riders.

Instantly he thrust his revolver muzzle against the temple of his prisoner, and said, sternly:

"One word or outcry from you, White Coyote, and you are a dead man!"

CHAPTER LIV.

OFF ON THE TRAIL.

The ears of the renegade, White Coyote, were as keen as were those of Buf-

falo Bill, and the two had caught the sound of hoof falls in the valley.

The thought had at first come to him that they were men of Buffalo Bill's company, but the scout's experience had at once noted the fact that whoever were the riders the horses they rode were unshod.

This, as stated, seemed proof to him that they were Indians; and the sound further told him that there were at least half a hundred ponies.

The cold muzzle of the revolver pressed hard against the temple of the White Coyote, and the scout's threatening words warned the renegade of a new crisis. Not a second too soon had the scout acted, for, though the Coyote had at first feared that those coming were whites, he quickly comprehended the fact that the hoofs were not shod.

Another moment and he would have uttered the signal that would have brought his Indian comrades to his rescue, but Buffalo Bill was too quick for him, and the renegade was silent through fear.

Until the loping horses had gone by the entrance to the Hidden Home, and the sound had died away up the valley, Buffalo Bill pressed the muzzle of his revolver against the head of his prisoner; then he said:

"You were wise to keep quiet, White Coyote, for I should have killed you had you raised your voice above a whisper."

"They were not your men, then?"

"You knew they were not, for you are not the one to be fooled in sounds and signs."

"You would have called your braves, and I would have been in a tight place."

"Rather; just as tight a squeeze as I now am in."

"I shall have to gag you, I see, while your people are about."

"Don't, for I will be as still as a mouse."

"I will not trust you," and the scout put over the hilt of his knife a large handkerchief, and thrusting it into the mouth of the prisoner, whose pleading he unheeded, he tied it there securely.

That done, he rode on slowly once more, and saw Jerry ahead.

Jerry led him to a cabin, the one the four negroes occupied. There the scout took the prisoner from his saddle, and, leading him within, bound him in one corner, where a buffalo robe and blanket had been spread for him.

"I will bring you some supper soon, and then you can go to sleep, for I shall remove the gag from your mouth. But I warn you that an outcry will mean death," enjoined the wary captor.

"I'm no fool, Buffalo Bill, and I know that you intend to take no chances. But, Cody, where am I?" asked the renegade, as the scout removed the gag.

"In a cabin in the mountains. I'll tell you no more; but remember, I have warned you to utter silence."

The renegade made no reply, and Buffalo Bill stepped out of the cabin, where Jerry awaited him.

"Jerry?"

"Sah to you, sah."

"I had a close call at the barrier just now, for half a hundred redskins rode by just as I entered."

"Oh Lordy!"

"The renegade intended to tune up and call them, but I headed him off, and now I am going on the watch for them, for those we set going this afternoon have met another band and brought them to the rescue, and we would have to make a big fight of it if they found us."

"We would that, sah."

"How many are you, all told?"

"Missy Luella, sah; den Quickstep, her servant girl; den we four niggers and the two dogs, now Mars' Bert is gone."

"And you have plenty of weapons and ammunition?"

"Yes, sah, heaps of both."

"Well, we could make a good fight if cornered; but, as the band passed up the valley, I wish to go after them and lead them off the scent, so that they may

not happen upon this place in the daylight."

"They hain't found it yit, sah."

"True, but they may. Have you a very fast fresh horse you can lend me?"

"Yes, sah, all our saddle horses is fast; but I kin catch Mars' Bert's mare, Lively, for you, and it will take a bird to keep up with her."

"All right; and tell Miss Lennox why I left, and that I will return as soon as I can do so with safety to her."

"You must also see that no one leaves this little retreat, and the barrier must be kept up, and two of you must stand guard there, while you had better muzzle your dogs to keep them from barking, should they scent Indians about."

"I will, sah; but won't you see Missy Luella, sah, before you goes?"

"Not to-night. Give my prisoner some supper, and guard him well. Now for the fleet-footed mare!"

Jerry called Pete and Luke to his aid; Lively was caught, and, ten minutes later, Buffalo Bill rode out of the retreat and up the valley, on the trail of the horsemen who had passed.

CHAPTER LV.

THE CHASE.

Buffalo Bill realized fully just what the return of the Indians to Shadow Valley meant.

Those who had fled before the attack of himself and the Black Guard had met another hunting party, or perhaps a band on the war-path, and all had come back to rescue their chief and seek scalps and revenge.

A half a hundred strong at least, they would be dangerous foes.

It was true that he and the four negroes, with Luella Lennox and Quickstep to load the guns for them, might make a stand for a while, but the valley could be flanked by the Indians making a long ride and gaining the cliff, and thus firing down upon the defenders.

No help was near, none could be expected, and it would have to be, therefore, a fight to the death—five against fifty.

With this in his mind the scout determined to act promptly—to do what he could to avert the conflict.

He was very tired, but he always sacrificed all thought of self when he could serve others in peril.

It would never do to let that beautiful girl face the terrible dangers that must come to her if the redskins attacked them there.

So Buffalo Bill rode out of the little valley, explaining all to Jerry, and started on after the redskins, to try and lure them out of the valley.

He cantered along in the moonlight, ever watchful, eyes and ears open for all that he might see or hear.

On and on he sped—on for many miles—when he came to a halt, for the intelligent Lively had given indications by her actions that there was danger ahead.

The scout had found the animal a splendid one, and her every movement under him convinced him that she possessed both matchless speed and endurance.

Listening attentively, he heard sounds ahead.

The Indians had gone into camp until dawn, to then find trails and follow them.

By a strange coincidence he was within a few paces of the grave of Boyd Bernard!

He, however, decided to stake his horse out, creep closer on foot, and find out what he could of the strength of the redskins and their intentions, for he understood their tongue well.

He soon had Lively hidden away on a grassy plot, and, going ahead on foot, passed right by Boyd Bernard's grave.

"I would give much to get at the real mystery of that man's resurrection, for it is hard for me to believe that he could get out of that grave alive," he said as he halted by the spot.

He paused only for a moment, then moved on, keeping in the shadows when possible, and ere long drew near the pines on the river where the redskins had halted.

Their ponies were staked out in the meadow, and he knew they were guarded, but he crept near enough to see that he had been right in his conjecture that there were half a hundred Indians in the band.

As he could not get near the pines without discovery, he decided to return to his horse and get what sleep he could.

He felt half-way tempted to return to the Hidden Home and urge Luella and the negroes to at once go with him to the fort for safety, but this idea he abandoned as impractical.

Then he thought of riding with all speed to Perdition City for help, trusting that the Black Guard could stand the Indians off until he got back, but if they failed to do that he would arrive too late with a rescue party, and the calamity he so dreaded would have occurred.

So he decided to wait until morning and then do all he could to lure the Indians to pursue him, and thus lead them away from the Hidden Home.

Looking at his watch in the moonlight, he saw that it was one o'clock. He could secure at least three hours' sleep, and he would take it, to be ready for what was in store—a new test of his skill and strength.

Returning to his horse, he wrapped himself in a blanket, threw himself down at the foot of a tree, and was almost instantly asleep.

He awoke on the minute of time, and, saddling up, was mounted and ready when the day dawned.

As though he did not know of the presence of the Indians in the valley, he rode straight toward their camp, and pretended not to see them until they discovered him in the early dawn. Instantly they rushed for their ponies.

Then he halted, scanned them coolly, and heard their loud cries that told they had recognized him.

"Pa-e-has-ka! Pa-e-has-ka!" they shouted, and as fast as they could saddle up and mount they started toward him.

He raised his rifle, as though to fire, but lowering it again turned and rode down the valley.

The Indians did not fire upon him, either. They wished to take the great Pa-e-has-ka, the King of Bordermen, alive; that would be far more glorious than to kill him in the saddle.

In ten minutes from their discovering him, the whole band was in hot pursuit, Lively keeping well ahead in a long, swinging gallop, and the scout as unconcerned as though he had not half a hundred deadly foes in full pursuit.

CHAPTER LVI.

GAMBLER LOU LANGDON ON THE TRAIL.

Matters in Perdition City, meanwhile, were progressing as usual, with much drinking, gambling, and the orgies and shooting affairs which had given that settlement its well-deserved name.

The coaches came in and went out on their regular runs; the Pony Riders sped away to and arrived from the other camps, and the miners still hunted for and dug gold in more or less paying quantities, as was their wont.

Louis Langdon, the gambler, went on in the even tenor of his way, and each night the saloons of Perdition City were full of the rough element so common in border camps of its rough and tough class.

One thing, however, seemed to trouble Gambler Lou Langdon. He had not seen or heard of Buffalo Bill or Gabriel Grandin, the Man Killer, since the night when the young Gold Hunter of Shadow Valley and his sable cohort had been last in Perdition City.

He could but recall that the young Gold Hunter and his negroes had silently

left the city; that close upon their heels had gone Boyd Bernard; that Gabriel Grandin had mysteriously disappeared, and Buffalo Bill had taken his departure.

What had been the result of these sudden and unaccountable movements Lou Langdon had wondered.

Buffalo Bill was his friend, and he felt some uneasiness regarding him, though he was well aware of the scout's ability to take care of himself in any circumstances he had thus far been placed.

Then Boyd Bernard, the mysterious gold prospector, had gone, and certainly his going so suddenly had been connected, in some way, with either Bert Lennox, Gabriel Grandin or Buffalo Bill.

The Man Killer's vanishment had been inexplicable, as he appeared to have come to Perdition City to make a considerable stay.

He had not, however, given up his quarters there, and his not having returned looked very strange to the gambler.

Interested as he was in Bert Lennox, Boyd Bernard, Gabriel Grandin and Buffalo Bill, he decided to ride to Trump Gale's ranch, Camp Tarry, to learn what he could of any one of them.

Two coaches met there, as the trails crossed, and three pony riders were wont to halt there for a change of mounts, while the fort was not far away. Trump Gale, therefore, was pretty well posted upon all that was going on for a hundred miles around him.

With more anxiety for his friend Buffalo Bill than curiosity regarding the others, and feeling sure that he could win a little money at Camp Tarry, Gambler Langdon set out for the ranch early in the morning.

A skilled frontiersman, he always went prepared for any emergency, so he took along a good camping outfit and several days' supplies in case of accidents.

He had once, in a short ride out of Perdition City, been "jumped" by redskins; had been cornered, after a hard chase, and nearly starved in the two days he stood them off, and he had vowed never to be again caught in a trap like that, with nothing to eat or drink.

He made the ride to Camp Tarry without accident, arriving in the afternoon, when the place was deserted, save for Trump Gale, Utah, the half breed, and Sing Lo, the Chinese factotum of the station.

"Awful glad to see you, Langdon. Sing Lo will get you something to eat in a hurry," was Trump Gale's welcome. Trump knew the gambler and liked him.

"Thanks, Gale. I am hungry, as every man in good health ought to be, and I know what that sly heathen of yours can do in the way of cooking."

"Tell him what I said—that I am not broke, and to turn himself loose."

Trump started Sing Lo to work, while Utah took the gambler's horse, and he and the storekeeper sat down for a chat.

"Any news, Trump?"

"Yes, some."

"Name it."

"Buffalo Bill trapped Red Knife Joe and two of his pards here, and took them to the fort as prisoners, where the chances are they'll hang."

"Sure; but what was the trouble?"

"Oh, Buffalo Bill took a scout down into Shadow Valley; Red Knife ambushed him, and was tracked here."

"It would have done your eyes good to see how Buffalo Bill roped in the whole outfit."

"I can imagine it. Kill any?"

"No, he took them all alive. I'll tell you about it, as it was out of the usual run, and will interest you."

Then Trump Gale proceeded to narrate the story, and when he had heard it through, Langdon asked:

"And where is Bill now?"

"Gone off on a ghost trail."

"What, chasing moonbeams?"

"Well, you are Cody's friend, as I am, and I don't mind telling you that he

killed a man down in Shadow Valley who laid for him. He buried the body in fine style, and coming back here at night, after taking his three prisoners to the fort, he saw the dead man here in my layout, and I saw him, too—the same identical chap he had put under ground."

"Trump, you have been drinking some of your own wit-muddle rum," averred the gambler, shaking his head protestingly.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE GAMBLER ON THE TRAIL.

The station keeper smiled at the inference of Gambler Lou, and replied:

"I suppose you think that, like a doctor, I should never take my own medicine, Lou?"

"Well, you have seen the evil of it, surely; but you and Cody must have been deeply indulging to see spirits."

"We saw a ghost, yes—or at least the man whom Buffalo Bill had killed and carefully buried."

"Who was he?"

"Boyd Bernard."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes; none other. He laid for Cody in Shadow Valley; they had it out, and Bernard went under—yes, under ground, for Buffalo Bill buried him. You know he always does his work decently and well; wouldn't leave even a redskin he had killed above ground for the coyotes to feed on."

"Yes, I know that is his style."

"Then he took the trail of Red Knife Joe and tracked him here, as I have told you."

"Pity he didn't kill him."

"Kept him for hanging, as the ruffian well deserved."

"Good success to the rope that strangles such brutes! But about this man Bernard—I thought he owed his life to Buffalo Bill?"

"So he did; but he was after his scalp in Shadow Valley, that is a fact."

"I always looked upon him as a mysterious but square man—not as a miscreant and ingrate."

"So did I."

"And you say Buffalo Bill came back here and here saw Boyd Bernard?"

"He did for a certainty."

"Then of a certainty he did not kill the man."

"Certainly not, for I am no believer in ghosts; but Cody was completely taken aback, for he had to shoot the man in self-defense; he shot to kill; he dug a grave and put him in it, and after all that to find him here it naturally set him to thinking queer things."

"I should say it would, Gale. But, what did they do when they thus met?"

"Bernard did not see Cody. The scout came, saw him before he entered the saloon, called me out, and intended to call him down again; but when, after our talk, he went to look for him, Boyd Bernard had left the saloon, mounted his horse and rode away."

"And then?"

"Buffalo Bill got some supplies and a horse from me and went off on the trail of the ghost, spook, shade or whatever it may be called."

"Haven't seen or heard of either since?"

"Not a word, and you may believe I am anxious."

"I should think you would be. So am I now; so I guess I'll strike Cody's trail and see where it ends, for he may need help that I can give."

"I'll really be glad if you will, for, as I say, I'm mighty anxious about him."

"But, tell me, Lou, what do you know about the Man Killer, Gabriel Grandin?"

"Next to nothing, I must admit."

"What has he against Cody?"

"I didn't know that he even knew him."

"Guess he does, and if I am not mistaken, he has it in for him for something, and from all accounts he's a dangerous man even to be upon the trail of

Buffalo Bill, who knows so well how to take care of himself."

"Have you recently seen Grandin?"

"I have, and right here, too."

"What was he after?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! Did they meet?"

"No; for I told the Man Killer that the scout had gone on to the fort. With that he got a horse from me and started after Cody, by the stage trail."

"But, Bill, has been back here since, you say?"

"Yes. I wished Cody to be on his guard, so wrote him a note and sent it by Utah, who knows the cut-offs. The red got ahead of the Man Killer, and delivered my warning."

"Cody had left the fort, and came on here, and it was then he saw Boyd Bernard."

"And Grandin?"

"Went on to the fort, as he had planned to do."

"This is getting slightly mixed, and more interesting, and I guess Buffalo Bill will really need me, so give me the best horse you have, some provisions, and your half breed Utah, and I will go off on the trail of the scout and his ghost."

After a hearty dinner Lou Langdon rode away from Camp Tarry, accompanied by Utah, the half breed, also well mounted, and with supplies for a ten days' trail, and ammunition enough for a small battle.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A DEATH BLOW.

Colonel Gardner perfectly well understood that he had a very remarkable man to deal with in Gabriel Grandin, the Man Killer.

The more he pondered the more he believed that he had met Gabriel Grandin before, when, or where, or under what name, he could not even vaguely surmise.

When Grandin had left headquarters Colonel Gardner sent for his adjutant and with him held conference.

"Captain Buxton, I have reason to know that our strange prisoner, Grandin, did not aid the three men brought in by Buffalo Bill to escape."

"I have discovered enough to, in a great measure, trust the man, and have told him that he was free to come and go at will, without restraint of any kind."

"Then he is not now a prisoner, sir?"

"No, not a prisoner; and yet I wish you to put men to shadow him continually, though without allowing him to suspect that he is under their espionage."

"I understand, sir. Did he tell who it was who aided him to escape, for it must have been the same one who helped out the three prisoners Cody brought in, and took the chances of killing the sentinel in doing so?"

"There is the rub; he did not tell me, but said that, later on, he would make all plain."

"How is the injured sentinel now?"

"I was just coming to report to you, sir, when I met your orderly, that he is dead."

"My God! Poor fellow! I had hoped his hurt was not so bad as that; but he died on his post of duty."

"Yes, sir, and may I suggest that, as the sentinel is dead, the one who aided those men to escape last night must now be held as a murderer."

"That is true; he must be, whoever he is."

"But, put those men to shadow Grandin, and let them report to me the result after parade. I wish to know just what he does and to be informed of every man in the fort to whom he speaks a word."

"I will see to it, sir," and the adjutant left headquarters, while the colonel, with a troubled brow, begun to pace to and fro in deep and painful thought.

The news of the death of the sentinel meanwhile had spread like wildfire. It was known in every part of the fort before he had been dead half an hour. Only one man seemed not to have heard the

news, and that was the one who was apparently, most interested—Gabriel Grandin.

He sat upon the little settee before his cabin door, reading a book which he had found in the quarters assigned him.

Hearing a step, he looked up to see Sutler Boss Ludlow approaching, with the things he had purchased from the post store.

He noticed at a glance that the sutler's face was deathly pale, and he said:

"Well, Pard Ludlow, glad to see you; but, are you ill?"

"No, but scared for you, as the sentinel at the lock-up is dead, and you are accused as the one who took his life."

"You must again leave the fort to-night. I will help you make your escape, for I alone can do it."

CHAPTER LIX.

THE SUTLER'S LETTER.

Gabriel Grandin heard what Sutler Ludlow said to him, without a word, or a change of countenance.

He appeared to be looking over the purchases in the basket the sutler had brought and at last remarked:

"A soldier yonder is watching us. He is a spy to discover whom I talk with and what I do."

"Take some of these things back to your store, and return with others, as a blind, and while there write what you wish me to do, and leave it with me."

The sutler obeyed, and the visit was made to appear exactly as though he had made a mistake in what he had bought and was going back to exchange the purchases.

Taking several things back in his basket, he started off, passing directly by the soldier, who was seated on a bench making a sketch of the interior of the fort, and with no unskilled hand.

"Hello, Sergeant Ramsey, still sketching, are you?"

"Yes, Mr. Ludlow; I am fond of it, and wish to sketch a good interior of the fort."

"It is strange you did not take to art instead of soldiering."

"I wished to experience the rough life on the frontier first, strict discipline to make a man of me, and at the same time to secure a great number of border subjects to paint up. I have saved up most of my money for use when I get my discharge, which will be this fall, sir."

"Yes, so I have heard; but is my face pale?"

"You are pale, Mr. Ludlow; are you ill?"

"No; but I am mad clean through, for yonder chap, and who is likely to hang, is too particular for this country. He sent back some things he bought at the store, to be exchanged for others. I wanted to jump on him with both feet, but didn't dare to, of course."

"From all accounts about him, you were very wise, sir, not to do so," intimated Sergeant Ramsey, with a smile, and the sutler passed on.

It was not long before Sutler Ludlow returned and, passing the sergeant with a word, went on to the quarters of the colonel's guest.

"I have written down all that you are to do. The feeling here is very bitter against you, and there is but one way to save your neck."

"Read this, and drop in for some purchase later, and let me know that you understand my plans and will be ready."

The sutler spoke in a low tone, and put a letter in the room, with the things he brought.

Grandin nodded and he left, while the sergeant remarked:

"All serene this time, sir?"

"Yes, but I'll bet a box of cigars he finds something wrong yet, and comes to exchange it," growled the sutler, and the sergeant responded:

"I believe women have to exchange what they buy once or twice, but I did not know that men did."

"He's that kind, I'll wager," and the storekeeper passed on.

Taking up the note he had left, Gabriel Grandin read:

"They place the sentinel's death upon you, all believing that the men were aided to escape by you, and then turned upon you afterwards to rob you, or kill you, for some reason not known to them.

"You cannot prove that you did not kill the man, and those two outlaws will swear that you did the killing to save their own necks; they will stand to that.

"I will again risk all to save you, and fortunately I can do so the more easily to-night, as I happen to know of a soldier who intends to desert to go to the mines, and he will be on duty to-night at the corral.

"I was going to report him, but will not do so, now. I have seen and arranged with him to have your horse and his all ready after midnight, when he goes on post, and I have a key to the corral gate, so you can both pass out, and ride for your lives, for you know what capture means to both of you.

"After the guards are relieved, at midnight, go to the corral. The soldier will be there and you are free. When you come to my store to report that you understand and all is well, I will give you the corral key."

Gabriel Grandin read the lines over twice; then he folded the paper and put it carefully away.

Half an hour after he took up one of the purchases brought by Sutler Ludlow, and started for the post store.

He stopped for a moment to ask permission to glance at the sergeant's sketch, complimented him upon his talent, and passed on.

"The sutler has him down fine about exchanging things, but maybe Ross Ludlow was palming off damaged goods upon him, as he often does upon the soldiers. If so, he is right not to be imposed upon.

"I'll sketch on until his return, for I can keep my eye on him from here."

CHAPTER LX.

THE SECOND LIFE ATTEMPT.

The artist sergeant, playing detective, kept his post until night, and could only report that Sutler Ross Ludlow had been twice to the quarters of Gabriel Grandin, who had also gone once to the sutler's and once to the dining hall.

Until eight o'clock the surveillance was kept up; then the sergeant was relieved of duty, as it was reported that Gabriel Grandin had retired for the night, and from the trying experience of the night before it was supposed that he must be very much fatigued.

After the guard rounds at midnight the door of Gabriel Grandin's quarters slowly opened, and he stepped out into the moonlight.

Seeing that he was not watched, as far as he could discover, he walked along in the shadows of the trees and cabins in a free and easy way, until he reached the wing of the stockade that led into the corral.

There stood a sentinel who challenged as he approached, but the answer given seemed to be satisfactory, and the Man Killer said, as he stepped up to where the soldier stood in the shadow of the wall:

"Your name is Richard Ridley?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whose friend are you?"

"Sutler Ludlow's, sir."

"All right. Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir, the horses are saddled and the weapons near, for, as I understood Mr. Ludlow, you did not dare bring your arms out of your quarters, in case you should be halted."

"That is correct, my man."

"I have weapons for you, along with our supplies. We will have but three and a half hours before our escape is discovered, but a couple more before pursuit can be commenced by following our trail."

"I am ready, and will get the weapons while you lead the horses out, for here is the key."

The man took the key and led the way to the spot where the supplies, blankets, two rifles and a couple of belts of arms were lying.

These Gabriel Grandin took up, while the soldier went to where he had hitched the horses he had saddled, with two other horses as a relief.

They soon passed out of the corral, when the Man Killer locked the heavy gate and put the key in his pocket.

Each man buckled on his belt of arms, and took his rifle, which Richard Ridley said were the very best, and all loaded.

Mounting, they rode away, the soldier leading.

For a mile they rode along at a canter; then Ridley drew rein and said:

"Here are two trails to take, sir."

Grandin rode up alongside of him, when suddenly the soldier thrust a revolver into his face and pulled trigger!

But the weapon did not go off!

Rapidly, again and again, the soldier pulled trigger, but with the same result; no explosion!

The Man Killer laughed, and thrusting his weapon into the face of the soldier, he cried:

"Hands up—quick!"

"I changed your weapons, suspecting treachery, for unloaded ones."

"Mercy, sir, mercy! Don't kill me!" and dropping his useless revolver the hands of the soldier were raised above his head.

"Here! Put these on, so you will not be dangerous," and, forcing the man's hands behind his back, Gabriel Grandin slipped about the wrists a pair of steel manacles!

Then he picked up the revolver, mounted and turned back to the fort!

"My God! where are you going, sir?" cried the terrified man.

"You will know in time," was the stern response.

Back to the stockade wall they went; the gate of the corral was opened by Gabriel Grandin, two of the horses were turned loose, but the one he had ridden, and the one that carried the supplies, were hitched securely.

Then the trembling prisoner was led through the corral and out of it to Gabriel Grandin's quarters, where he was secured to the bed with a lariat.

"Oh, sir, they will hang me! I did not intend to kill you, indeed I did not!" whined the would-be deserter.

"You were told to do so by your master, I know."

"Yes, sir; Ludlow told me you had a great deal of money, and I could get it and easily make my escape."

"I thought so. Now I will leave you, but to soon return. Silence! for you plead in vain," and the Man Killer left the cabin, locking the door after him.

He did not go to the corral again, but made his way toward headquarters.

As he neared headquarters Grandin saw a light in the colonel's room, and then his eyes fell upon the sentinel.

Answering the latter's challenge, he advanced, gave the countersign, and said:

"It is important that I see Colonel Gardner at once, sentinel."

"He is still up, sir, reading."

"Knock at that door on the left."

And the Man Killer did so.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TRAITOR.

Colonel Gardner had become interested in a recently published book, and, as was often his wont, decided to finish it before retiring.

When, in answer to the call, "Come in!" he saw Gabriel Grandin enter, he was certainly surprised, and said abruptly:

"What, you, Mr. Grandin?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is a late hour to call unrequested, sir. How did you pass the sentinel, sir?"

"I had the countersign, Colonel Gardner."

"Ah! this is surprising."

"Pardon me, Colonel Gardner, but I have called upon a most important matter, if you will hear me, sir."

"Certainly, sir, down!" answered the colonel, impressed by the words and manner of his strange visitor.

"Colonel Gardner, I did not tell you to-day who it was that aided my escape last night, but I have come now to do so, though, for the present, you alone must know."

"I think I must be the Judge as to that, sir!"

"No, sir; I am the one to judge, as you will admit when you hear all."

"The man who rescued me did so for two reasons: he knew I was a dangerous person to be in the fort, holding against him a secret that I did; so he wished to appear as my friend, to aid me to escape, and then have me die at the hands of three of his own comrades."

"They failed, as you know, and I came back, and not for a moment allowed him to feel that I suspected him."

"Now, I have to report, Colonel Gardner, that the same person again planned my escape, in spite of the spies you set upon me yesterday, and he once more arranged to have me put out of the way after I left the fort to-night under his auspices."

"Ah! and who is this most dangerous man in our very midst?"

Unheeding the question, the Man Killer went calmly on to say:

"I chimed in with him in his plan, pretended to be afraid of being hanged for killing the sentinel at the lock-up the night before, and he cleverly plotted my second escape, fate being kind to him in putting one of his secret hirelings on duty at the corral as sentinel there."

"I obeyed his written instructions, went to the corral, had been given the countersign by my pretended friend, and found the sentinel prepared for me, with two horses saddled and two extras to lead along with certain supplies and arms to carry along."

"The man had told me I must carry no weapons from my quarters, for, if halted, I could show that I was unarmed."

"I saw through his second plot and secretly carried my own belt of arms, and when those at the corral were given me by the traitor sentinel, I exchanged the belt which he gave me for his own, thus giving him the unloaded weapons—for unloaded I well knew they were."

"It was well I did, for when out of ear-shot of the fort he drew on me, and his revolver snapped six-times—not a cartridge in it."

"I then held him up, put manacles upon him, brought him back to the fort, and have him securely bound in my quarters."

"This is astounding information, Mr. Grandin."

"It is about all I have to tell, sir, save the name of the arch plotter and assassin."

"This soldier chosen for my assassination has lately joined. He was a miner, scout and guide for some time before he enlisted. He entered the army to serve his purpose and that of his master."

"By deserting to-night he expected to get rid of me and secure a large sum of money, weapons, a good outfit and four fine horses, and make his escape successfully and easily."

"Yes, Mr. Grandin, I see how it was, sir; but the master, the head devil in the conspiracy?"

"Is a man who has the full confidence of yourself, Colonel Gardner, and of every other person in camp, I believe."

"Not an officer?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Thank God for that!" fervently ejaculated the Colonel, while Grandin continued:

"Now, sir, to thoroughly catch this man in all his deviltry, you alone must know who he is, and also aid me to play a part yet necessary to play."

"I think I can readily promise to do so, Mr. Grandin."

"Thank you, sir. It must be thought by all in the fort, sir, save those whom you select to carry out my plot, that this deserter went away with me."

"You know that he is in my quarters, and two non-commissioned officers can be detailed to secretly guard him there, relieving each other, while the cabin is considered unoccupied, meals being taken to them by night."

"Just why is this sir?"

"That the deserter's master may think that he went with me, sir, and so accomplished his part of the scheme."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"It is my intention to return to the corral and leave, taking an extra horse with me, to let it be supposed that the soldier went along."

"You can send out a pursuing party, sir, but I will throw them off my trail, never fear."

"And I am to keep my eye on this traitor in our midst, not allowing him to know that he is suspected?"

"Yes, sir, that is important."

"Now, tell me who he is, Mr. Grandin, or I am most impatient to know."

"It is the fort sutler, sir—Ross Ludlow."

"My God! Ross Ludlow! I would as soon have suspected an officer as that man!"

And Colonel Gardner showed how really shocked he was at what Gabriel Grandin had revealed.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE MAN KILLER'S RUSE.

Colonel Gardner sprung to his feet and paced to and fro with considerable show of excitement when he learned who was the traitor in camp.

"Why, Mr. Grandin, that man has the power to do any amount of mischief, for he goes and comes at will, has the countersign given him regularly, and I even put him as a spy upon you!"

"Ross Ludlow has been for years upon the frontier. He once was wagon boss, and then was appointed post storekeeper. He has rendered many a good service, and has the confidence of every one."

"I do not doubt you find it hard to believe, sir, but I know the man better than you do, and have long been upon his track."

"I will tell you only this, now, but more later, and that is that Ross Ludlow is the secret leader of an outlaw band, as I will prove in good time; but you must not let him feel that you have the shadow of a suspicion against him, or he will escape in spite of all you can do, for you do not know who are his allies, nor what plans he has laid to get away if suspected."

"He shall suspect nothing through me, sir; be assured of that."

"But you say that you will leave the fort to-night?"

"At once, sir; but I would like to turn this deserter over to you first."

The colonel was silent for a moment; then he said:

"I must let my adjutant into this secret, and two non-commissioned officers I have in my mind as guards over that man you have as prisoner."

With this the colonel went out to the little cabin where his orderlies slept, and calling to one dispatched him for the adjutant.

That officer soon arrived, and he heard what was to be done, so went himself after the two non-commissioned officers, and sent them to the quarters occupied by Gabriel Grandin.

"Now, sir, I will go to the quarters I had and await Captain Burton and the two guards, after which I will mount and be off, but the corral will have to be without a guard until the next relief."

"I will have one of the deserter's guards on duty about there until morning; but, where are you going, Mr. Grandin, I should like to ask you?"

"On the trail of Buffalo Bill, sir!"

"Ah! and where?"

"To Camp Tarry, Perdition City, Shadow Valley, anywhere to find him, sir, for it is very important that I see him as soon as possible."

"You know your business best, sir; but, suppose Cody should come to the fort, as he may at any hour?"

"If so, sir, ask him to take my trail, picking it up at Perdition City, as I will leave word with Gambler Lon Langdon where I can be found, and perhaps, sir, I may return here within the day."

"You are a most mysterious man, Mr. Grandin."

The Man Killer smiled and bowed as he turned to depart, but the colonel stepped forward and grasped his hand in farewell.

Going to his quarters, Gabriel Grandin found there Captain Burton, a sergeant and a corporal, and unlocking the door they entered the room. A lamp was lighted and there lay the deserter, bound to the bed.

"Now, sir, I will take my traps and bid you good-night!" said Grandin, telling Captain Burton about sending one of the guards to the corral, to hang about there until dawn.

The corporal was detailed for that duty, the sergeant was given his orders and left alone with the bound deserter, and while Captain Burton returned to report to the colonel, the Man Killer went to the corral, mounted his horse, and with the other in lead started on his hunt for Buffalo Bill.

The corporal let him through the outer gate, having been given the key by Grandin, who now disappeared in the distance.

When morning came the alarm was given.

Richard Ridley, the sentinel on duty at the corral, was gone from his post, his musket was leaning against the stockade wall, two of the horses were missing and it was plain that the man had met with foul play or deserted.

Then it was discovered that one of the horses missing was the animal belonging to Gabriel Grandin, and Captain Burton was sent to his quarters to investigate.

He reported that the man, his weapons and all were gone.

Then it was plain that Richard Ridley had deserted, aiding Gabriel Grandin to escape, doubtless, all said, having been bribed to do so, for it was given out that the Man Killer had still been considered a prisoner, in spite of his return to the fort with the two men who had escaped the night before.

The sutler arose late, as was his custom; heard the news, and looked as serene as a May morn.

The pursuers sent after the supposed fugitives returned in the night, the officer reporting that his best scouts had been thrown off the trail after following it many miles.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE UNSEEN ALLY.

"Ho, pard, make a stand, if your horse is used up, and I'll help you out!"

The words fell upon Buffalo Bill's ears with startling distinctness.

The voice came from a group of boulders ahead, though he saw no one.

Whoever had spoken to him, and offered aid, was hidden there among the boulders.

The scout was going at a swift canter, and the Indians were lashing their evidently tired horses in pursuit, and it seemed were slowly gaining.

To any one seeing the scout's approach it might appear that his horse was tired out, as he rode no faster, and was going to be overtaken.

Believing this, the man among the boulders was plucky enough to come to the aid and offer to make a standing fight against big odds to aid a fellow being.

Buffalo Bill picked out the spot where he thought the man must be concealed, though he saw no horse.

But the boulder and pines would also hide the animal as well as the man.

He would not seek the same retreat as his unknown friend, so, looking about, beheld a large boulder in the shape of a crescent.

It was just high enough for him to sit in his saddle and fire over, and its shape would protect his horse and himself from flank shots.

Instantly he wheeled toward it, waving his hand to his still unseen ally, and calling out:

"Thanks, pard."

"We will stand them off for a while, and then make a ride for it!"

"Ay, ay, sir, I am ready, and when it comes to a run my horse can carry double if yours gives up," was the answer.

Dashing into the space formed by the crescent-shaped boulder, Buffalo Bill saw that the rock had a break in it, where he could stand, thus relieving Lively of his weight while halted.

He saw, too, that he could just rest his rifle upon the top of the rock and peer over.

Quickly he got ready, and he was glad to see that the Indians supposed that he had ridden on and was hidden from them by the other boulders and thicket.

On came the Indians at the utmost speed of their ponies.

Nearer and nearer they came, until suddenly, when those in the lead were a hundred yards from the boulder that concealed Buffalo Bill, over the top was thrust a weapon, and shot after shot from the repeating rifle sent deadly messengers upon the redskins, while from the right the unseen ally rattled forth shot for shot with the scout's fire, and sent to earth rider and pony under the unerring aim of the two men at bay.

CHAPTER LXIV.

FACE TO FACE.

The Indian band, charging down Shadow Valley, in chase of Buffalo Bill, certainly ran against a snag they had not looked for when two repeating rifles flashed out, from different positions, upon them.

They appeared to think, from the rapidity of the shots, that they were rushing upon an ambush of a dozen or more men. The result of the fire added to this belief, for warriors fell from their ponies, and horses also went down, killed or wounded.

Hastily the braves in the lead wheeled their ponies and dashed back to cover with headlong speed.

"Shall we slip away now, pard, or await and give them another dose of Winchester?"

"There is no hurry if your horse is dead beat," called out the unseen ally to Buffalo Bill.

"I will come over and join you, my good friend, for from your position our retreat cannot be seen, though I am anxious to have the reds follow me, to lead them away from this valley, my horse not being used up as you think," called back Buffalo Bill across the four hundred feet that divided him from his invisible comrade.

"Ay, ay! Ride over, then, and we'll decide upon what is best," answered the other.

Buffalo Bill mounted as soon as he had reloaded his rifle, and rode over to join the man still in hiding.

Riding up to the retreat of his unseen ally, Buffalo Bill dismounted, and throwing Lively's bridle rein over a bush, stepped forward to meet the man who had so pluckily come to his rescue.

Another moment and the man stepped out from among the scrub pines and Buffalo Bill's nerve for once had a severe shock.

He stood face to face with Boyd Bernard—the Rover!

The scout eyed the man from head to foot with a look that seemed to read

through, and did not yet appear to see his outstretched hand or hear his words:

"You can be no other than the great scout, Buffalo Bill, I feel sure."

"Allow me to say," responded the scout, in a low, earnest tone, "that several days ago I was shadowed into this valley by you, fired upon by you from ambush, and my answering shot, as I then believed, killed you. I buried, as I thought, your dead body, as I wished to be humane, and knowing you as Boyd Bernard, I cut that name into the bark of the tree at the base of which I dug your grave."

"We had met once before, when I had rendered you a service, and why you sought to kill me I do not know."

"It was a startling surprise for me to see you two nights ago at Camp Tarry, but now to find you here, coming to my aid, when I believed you in your grave, from which in some miraculous way you escaped. I am simply dumfounded."

The man listened with deepest attention to the scout's statement and then responded, in a calm manner:

"It is a case of mistaken identity, sir, for you and I have never met before, though once I saw you pass near me."

"The man you knew as Boyd Bernard was my twin brother, my name being Bruce Bernard—a victim, with others, of my wicked brother's acts."

"Mr. Bernard, I can see now that you tell me only what is true, for, though strangely like your brother, to the casual glance, his face bore not the stamp of honesty that yours does."

"I saved your brother's life once, not yours, as I just now believed, and I could not understand why he should turn against me; nor can I yet see through his motive," said Buffalo Bill.

The man who called himself Bruce Bernard looked over the rocks at the Indians, saw that they were still holding a pow-wow, discussing the repulse they had received, and replied:

"I will tell you why, in a nutshell, sir—why he not only turned against you, but every one else who befriended him."

"We were twin brothers, as I told you, and he made my life so unhappy in my home that I went to the Southwest to live on a ranch."

"He came there in distress, and broke up my home. I then returned to the East, while he came up into this country and became a scout."

"When I arrived East I found why he had left there, for he had ruined our father financially, and others with him, although he had a big fortune in his keeping that belonged to his sister, and it, too, was swept away."

"My brother loved the young girl as much as he was capable of loving any one, but so persecuted her and her brother that they came west to hide from him."

"My father had been an army officer, but, ruined in fortune, when over fifty years of age, he came out here to hunt for gold, was successful, but had to bury what he had—which was a very large sum—and go east, completely broken in health."

"He soon after died, but gave into my hands a duty to perform—to come to the West here, secure his hidden gold, and give to the brother and sister, whose guardian he was, every dollar that they had been robbed of by my brother."

"I at once begun my search for the brother and sister, who were from the south, living on a plantation."

"I found that I could trace them into this country, and here lost them."

"They had come up here with their faithful negro servants, once slaves of the family, and had found a resting place beyond my power to discover."

"Although the papers and maps given me by my father to trace the gold had been much worn, I at last found where

the gold was hidden, but only two days ago, and when I did so I made the startling discovery that my brother Boyd had been killed and was buried in the very grave that held the treasure, for it had been so placed to deceive, and an inscription was cut by my father into the tree near it to further carry out the idea that some one rested there."

"I was so much moved to discover that in death my brother still dogged my path that I took up his body and buried it some distance away from the spot where you, as I now know, had placed him, and cut his name into the tree."

"I filled in the grave to still hide the gold, which lies beneath, and added to what was carved upon the tree, and, though sorry for Boyd's death, could but admit that his end was a just one."

"Happy in having found the gold, I intended to again go on the search for those I so wish to find, yet with little hope now of doing so, I fear, and I was on my way to the fort to ask for a guard to come into this valley for the treasure and carry it to a place of safety when I saw you coming and so decided to help you out."

Extending his hand, Buffalo Bill said warmly:

"And I will help you out, Mr. Bernard, for as soon as we have thrown those Indians off our track I will guide you to the Hidden House, in Shadow Valley, of Bert Lennox and his sister, though I regret to say he is not there, having mysteriously disappeared some days ago."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE BATTLE IN THE VALLEY.

For some time the two men, whom fate had so strangely brought together, talked over the situation, and when at last the Indians were again advancing, they had decided just what they were to do.

"We'll give them another stand off, and then start," announced Buffalo Bill.

Once again the repeating rifles of the two men rattled merrily, and again red-skin riders and ponies fell before the unerring aim of the two dead shots, and men of undaunted nerve.

Mounting quickly, the scout and Bruce Bernard rode rapidly away down the valley, while the redskins, leaving a few braves to bring on the dead and wounded, followed in hot chase.

"Do you see yonder cliff?" asked the scout, as they sped along, with two-score warriors in full chase.

"Yes."

"That is the entrance to the Hidden Home, though you would not discover it until right upon it, and you see that the soil here leaves no hoofmark, so to find the place, except by accident, would be impossible."

"Lennox chose well, indeed. I hope the Indians will not happen on it by accident."

"I think not; but we must lead them by, for that was my intention in leaving the Hidden Home after the redskins, as I feared they might scout in the valley, and so find it."

"We are just passing the entrance now."

The redskins were coming along at full speed, a short distance in the rear of the two horsemen, who had now passed the cliff, when suddenly there was heard a wild yell that echoed from cliff to cliff!

The Indians heard it and halted, listening attentively.

"In Heaven's name what is that?" asked Bernard anxiously.

"I can tell you: It is the renegade White Coyote, chief of this tribe, who, I told you, was a prisoner, with an Indian brave, in the Hidden Home."

"Has he escaped?"

"Yes; see there! and we cannot head them off."

"This is too bad, for it means a fight right here, and no help at hand."

What the two now saw was the White Coyote and his Indian companion scrambling down the steep mountain side, just beyond the cliff, and where they would soon reach the valley, not three hundred yards from where the redskin horsemen then were.

"It is too bad they escaped, and just at this time. I hope they have done no harm in the little home," said Bruce Bernard.

"So do I, Pard Bernard. But do you see that group of rocks back there?"

"Yes."

"That is our fort. From there we can command the entrance to the Hidden Home with our rifles. I have perfect confidence in the Black Guard doing well their duty in resisting the attack, and that means a great deal."

"They have ample firearms, and both Miss Lennox and her maid can shoot well, while the barrier will form a strong breastwork. So we can make it lively for the redskins from there."

"Come, we must get into position."

With this the scout led the way to the rocks he had selected as a fort, Bruce Bernard following.

The Indians saw their intention, but too late to check it, and they stopped short, to await their chief, who was now coming rapidly toward them.

Hardly had he reached the band when he was seen gesticulating wildly, and almost immediately led the braves toward the cliff.

They were suddenly met by a galling fire from the secret entrance, and Buffalo Bill shouted:

"The Black Guard Dead Shots are on hand!"

"Bravo, boys! They have emptied several saddles with their first fire!"

"Now turn loose with your rifle, Mr. Bernard, and I'll keep mine in reserve."

Bruce Bernard at once, but with steady hand, opened a rapid fire, and every shot told, while shouts came from the Sable Samsons, as they realized that strong allies were at hand.

The Indians had fallen back under the scathing fire from the Black Guard and their two allies among the rocks, and were holding an excited powwow.

This lasted a long time, but at last the White Coyote got his braves once more up to the attacking point, for they moved forward on foot, forcing their horses in front of them, and upon the side toward the rocks, as a protection.

"I shall try for the chief," soon announced Buffalo Bill. "You remain here to cover my retreat!" and he immediately dashed out of cover, directly toward the band!

The Black Guard opened a deadly fire, and pony after pony went down, but the daring approach of the dreaded scout halted the redskins to fire upon him.

Suddenly he halted, leaped from his saddle, and, taking deliberate aim, unheeding the arrows and bullets fired upon him, he pulled trigger.

The wild yell that went up told that he had killed the White Coyote; but, undismayed, the redskins continued to move on toward the cliff.

But suddenly from the thick pines at the base of the mountains flashed shot after shot from unknown helpers; the Black Guard poured in a terribly hot fire; Bruce Bernard came dashing out to join Buffalo Bill, and their repeating rifles made the valley ring with echoes, until it seemed as though a regiment was in action.

This unlooked-for fire from the mountain side dazed the redskins, and their white chief no longer being there to lead them, they broke in wild confusion, and, leaving their dead, swept down the valley in a mad stampede.

"Let them go, for I do not believe in killing wantonly."

"Now to see who our brave allies are," and Buffalo Bill rode forward, with

Bruce Bernard, just as three horsemen came out of the pines into full view.

"The Man-Killer, Lou Langdon, and Utah, the Half-Breed!" cried Buffalo Bill, and he spurred forward to meet them, Bruce Bernard by his side.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE MEETING OF HEROES.

Buffalo Bill was right; the three horsemen were none other than Gabriel Grandin, the Man-Killer; Lou Langdon, the Gambler, and Utah, the Half-Breed of Camp Tarry!

It was a strange meeting of heroic men there in Shadow Valley; but, as the scout rode forward, he did not forget the warning sent him by Trump Gale that the Man-Killer was upon his trail!

Useless warning it was, for now he came, it would seem, not as a foe, but as a friend, for he was with Lou Langdon and Utah.

Nor did Lou Langdon forget that Trump Gale had told him how Buffalo Bill had killed Boyd Bernard, whom he now saw, as he believed, with the very man who had taken his life!

The two men, Gabriel Grandin and Lou Langdon, with Utah as the guide of the latter, had met only that morning on the trail.

Utah led them rapidly along on the trail of Buffalo Bill and his Black Guard, but the tracks of the latter they could not understand, and supposed that the scout had been followed by foes. If so, it was well the three friends were there.

Reaching Shadow Valley, they came into it behind the pursuing Indians, and their glance revealed the scout and Boyd Bernard being pursued by them.

Anxious to get ahead of the redskins and join the scout, Utah led them by a flank movement along the base of the hills, and they had reached the thicket of pines near the entrance to the Hidden Home, when the halt was made, the fight begun, and they were on hand to lend valuable aid—greatly to the surprise of the reds, the scout, and Bruce Bernard, and the Black Guard as well.

Anxious to note the result as the scout came forward, Lou Langdon met him with a warm grasp of the hand, and said:

"And here is a gentleman who says he is your secret ally, though you are unknown to each other personally. We knew him in Perdicion City as Gabriel Grandin, the Man-Killer."

Buffalo Bill's piercing eyes met those of the man thus introduced, but before he could speak, Gabriel Grandin said something in a whisper, which only the ears of the scout caught.

Instantly Cody's fine face lighted up, and, extending his hand, he warmly grasped that of the Man-Killer, while he said, heartily:

"Yes, Langdon, I know who this gentleman is, and I vouch for him under any and all circumstances. But, let me introduce to you both my comrade, Mr. Bruce Bernard, the brother of the man you knew."

For a few minutes the four white men talked together, while Utah had gone off, and was standing by the dead body of the renegade chief, White Coyote.

"Now, let me tell you, as I rode down the valley, before I met you, Mr. Bernard, I saw on a rocky point a white man watching my flight."

"Even at the distance he was from me, I recognized a desperado who was in Perdicion City the night I left there. His being here in this valley, and at the spot where I saw him, convinces me that he has a retreat near the spot; and more, that he is the one who can account for the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Bert Lennox, whose home is here in this valley—ah! here comes Miss Lennox now, and the Black Guard!"

Buffalo Bill rode forward to meet Luella Lennox, and held a short, but earnest, conversation with her.

Then Cody called to Bruce Bernard to join them, for the scout had told her

that Bruce was not the man who had so wronged her brother and herself, and driven them to the wilds of the West to seek a home.

The party at length rode forward and met Gabriel Grandin and Lou Langdon. Luella saw that the White Coyote was dead, and told how he had gnawed his thongs in two with his teeth, released the Indian also, and that their escape had not been known until they saw them flying across the plain from the mountain.

"Now, Miss Lennox, as I came here to find your brother, I will start at once on the trail, for I suspect about where he is, and these gentlemen will, I know, be my allies. I will also ask that two of your Black Guards, Jerry and Jute, go with us, for we may find quite a force there to fight," explained Buffalo Bill.

This was decided upon, though Luella insisted that they should have dinner first at the Hidden Home, and then go on fresh horses, with which she could provide them.

CHAPTER LXVII.

CONCLUSION.

Buffalo Bill was right in his conjecture regarding the man he saw on the point of rocks, for, after careful search, they came upon a trail, which finally led them to a well-covered retreat in the mountain of a band of outlaws. This they reconnoitered, and moved at length upon it, surprising there a half-dozen men in their camp. In that camp was, as a prisoner, Bert Lennox.

The young Gold-Hunter had been lassoed and dragged from his saddle, and was being held to force from him the secret of where he had his gold hidden.

No mercy was shown to any of the desperadoes save one, who was spared by Buffalo Bill to serve as a decoy for the capture or spotting of the rest of the band.

This was a successful ruse, for the man gladly saved his own life by betraying his comrades, and told of two more of the band, then at Perdicion City, one at Camp Tarry, and two at Fort Overlook.

"I can tell you who the two at the fort are, one being Ludlow, the sutler, the other a soldier."

"Yes," remarked Grandin, "I know the man. He is now a prisoner, and the sutler we will bag upon our return."

"You, Mr. Cody, and I will go to Perdicion City, catch the two of the outlaw organization who are now there as look-outs; then we will scoop in the one at Camp Tarry, and next visit the fort, where Mr. Lennox will meet us all. Lennox says he will give up this wild life at once, and return to his Southern home, now that he is rich from his own gold finds and the treasure Mr. Bernard will turn over to him."

It was Grandin, now, who arranged it all, and soon after he and Buffalo Bill started for Perdicion City, the prisoner being taken by the others to the Hidden Home, and then on to the fort, to see if he had given correct information.

As they rode along together, Grandin revealed to Buffalo Bill how he had ascertained that all the men he had killed had been renegades in the Indian camps, and whom he knew to have murdered their own race, destroyed houses, and raided settlements. Every one of them, he explained, knew him as one who would not be persuaded to become "an Indian," and that, having escaped from the rendezvous of redskin and renegade, where he had been held a prisoner, they all knew he would work for their destruction.

"Those were the men whom it meant death for me to meet," he continued, "and, as I have undertaken for the Government to run down the band of counterfeiters operating in this country, I thought of you to aid me, and hence wrote you, and well indeed have you served me; though you have known me only as Grand, the Detective."

"You have found the whole outfit of these counterfeiters, you say?"

"Yes, it is near the fort, and you have told me what I was trying to find out—who was the chief."

"Ross Ludlow and his counterfeiting band were road-agents as well; but we will have run all to earth, as soon as we catch Ludlow. He yet has in the fort the good money his men took from Paymaster Benson's package."

The two men at Perdicion City were taken in their cabin at night; the one at Camp Tarry followed; then, going on to the fort, Buffalo Bill and Gabriel Grandin arrived late at night, held a long interview with Colonel Gardner. After that interview Ross Ludlow was seized in his store and put in irons.

That trial and quick punishment followed for their crimes, with the two men who had been Red-Knife Joe's comrades along with the rest, can be surmised, and thus was a just doom visited upon the counterfeiter and outlaw band, the "informer" alone being allowed to go free.

Arriving at the fort, as arranged, Bert Lennox and his sister were most warmly welcomed, and, after a short stay there, took their departure for their Southern home, Quickstep and the Black Guard accompanying them, while Bruce Bernard also formed one of the party.

Between Luella and Bernard a feeling had been awakened which could, and did, end in but one way, marriage, and a happy life after all the sorrows and sufferings they had known.

Lou Langdon, at Cody's earnest solicitation, abandoned the life of sport, and joined Buffalo Bill's band of scouts, and is now well known upon the frontier as a generous-hearted, dashing fellow, ready for any good work.

Gabriel Grandin's services won for him an appointment as Second Lieutenant in the army, and his past experience has aided him greatly in ascending the ladder of promotion as well as fame.

As for Buffalo Bill—whose name and fame is more of a household word in all the land?

Let us add: Of all the stories of his eventful career, he delights most to tell of his scouting with the Black Guard of Dead Shots in Shadow Valley.

THE END.

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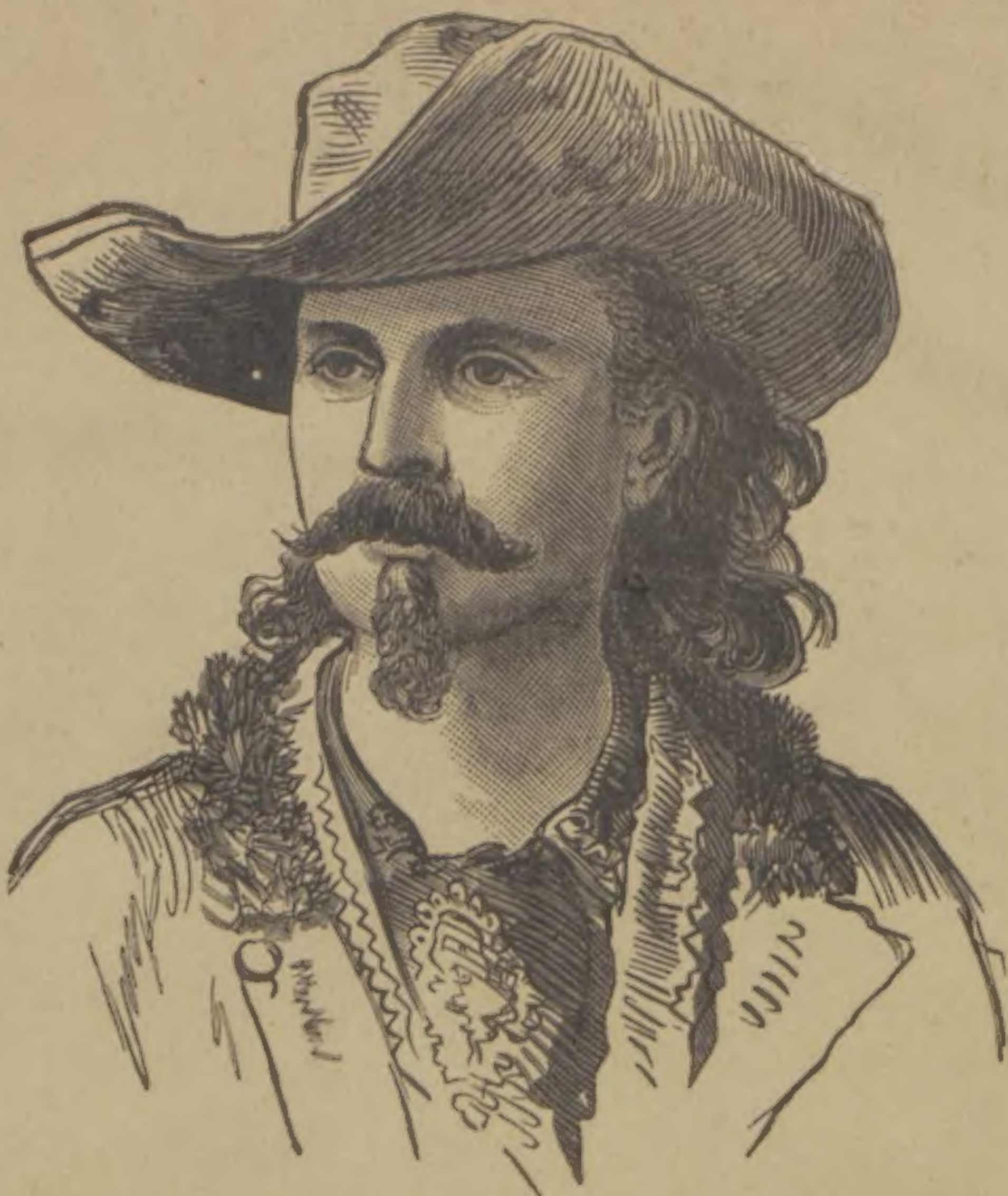
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